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Christmas 1989

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From Bethlehem to Berlin

"In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands — a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces." Daniel 2:44, 45

Calvinist Contact

An independent Christian weekly that seeks to proclaim the truth, care and rule of Jesus Christ.

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Editorial

Christmas is for strangers

The more I think about Christmas the more I think it answers to a very deep feeling of being out of place, of not really belonging where we are. It's odd that I should say this. Many people associate Christmas with being at peace with the world and with being home. "I'll be home for Christmas, if only in my dreams," Johnny Mathis used to croon, as if the feast he was singing about was all the affirmation we needed that on December 25 everything falls into place again.

But think for a moment what made Christmas necessary. As soon as Adam and Eve rebelled against God's will for their lives, they were expelled from Paradise. They were thrust into an inhospitable world — no more walks with God on the familiar acreage of the garden, no more around-the-clock security without and peace within. No more innocent staring into each other's eyes and touching each other's bodies. Adam and Eve were the first D.P.s of humankind.

From thereon, the history of humankind became filled with migrations, invasions, flights to freedom, immigrations, dispersions, displacements, abductions, urban flight and whatever else forced people into unfamiliar and strange places and circumstances.

One only has to think of Abraham to get the picture. God told him to pick up all his belongings and leave the land of his forebears. The place of destiny was unknown to him. God would lead him. Abraham became a sojourner for many years and a stranger in the land of Palestine.

Think next about how Jacob and his children moved to Egypt and how for the next hundreds of years their descendants became slaves in a foreign country. Then there is the journey of the people of Israel through the wilderness for some 40 years. And the times of invasions and captivity. What a lot of displacement and of not feeling that you belong.

Foxes have holes

But then Christ comes to Bethlehem. Surely this must be a homecoming to end all displacements. Not really. Jesus certainly was out of place. He left his father's house to be born into the same world that Adam and Eve had been thrust into — an inhospitable world that would not recognize him as its Messiah.

And what about the circumstances surrounding his birth and life? His parents were not home in Nazareth when he was born, but in Bethlehem, temporarily displaced by an imperial command. Even though this was Joseph's ancestral town, he must not have had any relatives that could put the couple up for a few nights. So, Jesus was born in a feeding trough in a stable — not the kind of place one would choose for the arrival of a new baby. A few years later he and his parents had to flee to Egypt to escape King Herod's murderous intent.

During his life on earth, Jesus was more out of place than foxes and birds because he had nowhere to lay his head. At the end of his life he was hung on a cross, suspended between heaven and earth, a complete outcast; fully displaced.

But to come back to his birth, who were the ones who greeted him, besides his displaced parents? There were the angels, of course. Certainly they did not belong on earth. They were messengers from another kingdom. There were the shepherds: political nobodies, economic slaves, social outcasts who were more at home in the field than in the town. There were Simeon and Anna, both senior citizens, who understood that Israel needed to be rescued from the displacement caused by sin at a time when Palestine was occupied territory. They themselves were near the end of their lives, when the great emigration would take place. And finally there were the wisemen from the East, strangers in Jerusalem, who had travelled a long time to bring gifts to the newborn king.

Looking for another place

Christmas is a feast of homecoming, a celebration of belonging, you say? Wouldn't it be more accurate to place Christmas in the context of Hebrews 11:13-16?

> *All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead they were looking for a better country — a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.*

So, if on December 25 you feel depressed by the situation in El Salvador, if it bothers you that teen-aged girls are sold to customers by their pimps in Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal and Halifax, if you think your citizenship is in another world, not in this rat race, at a drinking party, in the stock market, in fancy clothing and trinkets, well then, you might just be in the right spirit to celebrate the birth of an immigrant baby from heaven.

Some of you may feel alienated because of separation or divorce, others may feel like strangers because you are sick, perhaps even in the hospital during Christmas. Others cope with visible or invisible handicaps, still others are isolated in prisons. Maybe you feel like a stranger because people know that you have an alcohol problem or that you have committed adultery. If so, you are in a better than usual position to appreciate the meaning of Christmas.

The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden *by Giovanni di Paolo (15th century). Detailed panel from* The Annunciation.

That song about being home for Christmas is not all that reassuring, by the way, when you realize that it probably originated from the trenches in Europe during World War II. Many of us will recall the great displacements caused by that destructive time. There often is something melancholic about crooning. And melancholy is a disease caused by displacement.

Christ became an alien so that he might help you in your displacement, caused indirectly or directly by sin, into a place of reconciliation, a country where you will feel you belong. His coming was the beginning of the end of all alienation. From out of his displacement he reaches out to you, and invites you to sustain yourself in Bethlehem, which appropriately means the "house of bread." You may not be "home" for Christmas, physically or emotionally, but you can be at the manger to be with those who look for a better country.

BW

One-way love

Nicholas B. Knoppers

This is what love is: it is not that we have loved God, but that he love us and sent his Son ....

We say that love is a two-way street. I love you and you love me. We are right; love must be mutual. Yet this concept of love can become a devilish formula.

With it we can hang on to an argument, sometimes for years: "It is her turn to give in." With it we can end a friendship: "I did this and that for him but seldom got a response." With it we can withhold any further aid: "... Not even one thank you!" With it we can block reconciliation in the church: "They must first admit that *they* were wrong." With it we can defend leaving the church: "I'm never visited by anyone from the church, but they know how to find me when they want money."

All kinds of relations among friends, in marriage, the family, society and among nations are ended with this I'll-give-if-I-get attitude.

I'll give you this, you give me that .... If this were basic in God's relationship to us and our world, Christmas would never have been. For the whole history of humankind is a story of unanswered love.

Adam came, literally, straight out of God's loving hands. But Adam used *his* hands to grab the forbidden fruit.

Lot's wife was rescued from the doomed city by the angels of the Lord at the last minute. Once saved by grace, she looked back.

God called Abraham and promised him protection. A little later, Abraham cheated a tribal king to save his own neck by saying that his wife was his sister.

Moses was the God-chosen leader who would bring Israel out of slavery and injustice, but he killed an Egyptian on his own authority.

God was the source of Sampson's strength and glory. One day Samson dozed off with his massive head in Delilah's lap ....

All the drinking vessels of King Solomon were of pure gold, but the king raised his cup like a playboy to toast his concubines.

The Lord called Manasseh back to him but Manasseh said, "I don't care."

The last book of the Old Testament reports that the people came to the House of the Lord with offerings they would not have dared to present to any civic leader.

After all that, there is a gap of more than 400 years. We do not read anything about service to the Lord. So insignificant, so low and so corrupt is the response of the people that God is, as it were, speechless.

When the fulness of time had finally come and God spoke again to his people through his Son and heir to all things, a priest serving in the temple expressed his doubt about the message. And an inn keeper, a member of the Covenant, told the pregnant Mary, "No vacancy." And a choir, not of men and women but of angels, had to sing the first Christmas carol. And theologians schooled in the Law and the Prophets conspired with Herod to get rid of the child Jesus.

Christ was in the world and the world was made by him but the world knew him not. He came to his own and his own received him not. If, indeed, God had waited until we had made room for him — till we loved him first — Christmas wouldn't have happened. And we would still be in our sins; and with us, all who have died with the dream of heaven would be in hell.

The Lord be praised: God sent his Son .... He held out his gracious hands to a disobedient and indifferent people. He came to visit us who did not invite him. He sought us while we were yet his enemies.

This is what love is, says St. John, not that we loved God but that he loved us. True love is giving and giving and giving. But *our* love is usually circular. We send it out with the intent of receiving an equal or fuller measure. We love others as we love oranges: for all the juice we can squeeze out of them.

Our love is mostly conditional. We love *because:* he is so handsome or she is such a beauty; he has a steady job or she has money. Because those we love are nice and lovable.

No wonder, then, that the man who had been lame for 38 years had to say to Jesus (who had asked him whether he wanted to be healed), "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred."

This is also why so many people in the world's big cities are homeless and hungry; and if they do receive *some* charity, have to suffer the humiliation of standing in line at a foodbank. This is why the one, only and last hope of millions of wandering children is to acquire foster parents. This is why a person walks out on his or her spouse, why a church may be divided and still splitting, why a consumer society consumes itself.

Thank you, Lord, that you did not wait for us to be lovable. You came to us in spite of who and what we are. At this Christmas time you tell us anew that we are most welcome at the Manger, over which hangs the dark shadows of the saving Cross.

Christmas celebrates the divine one-way love. This celebration must include a response: to love God in surrender and to care about others unselfishly, "with no thought of return ... even though the human heart craves love and appreciation."

Nicholas Knoppers is a retired Christian Reformed pastor who lives in Edmonton.

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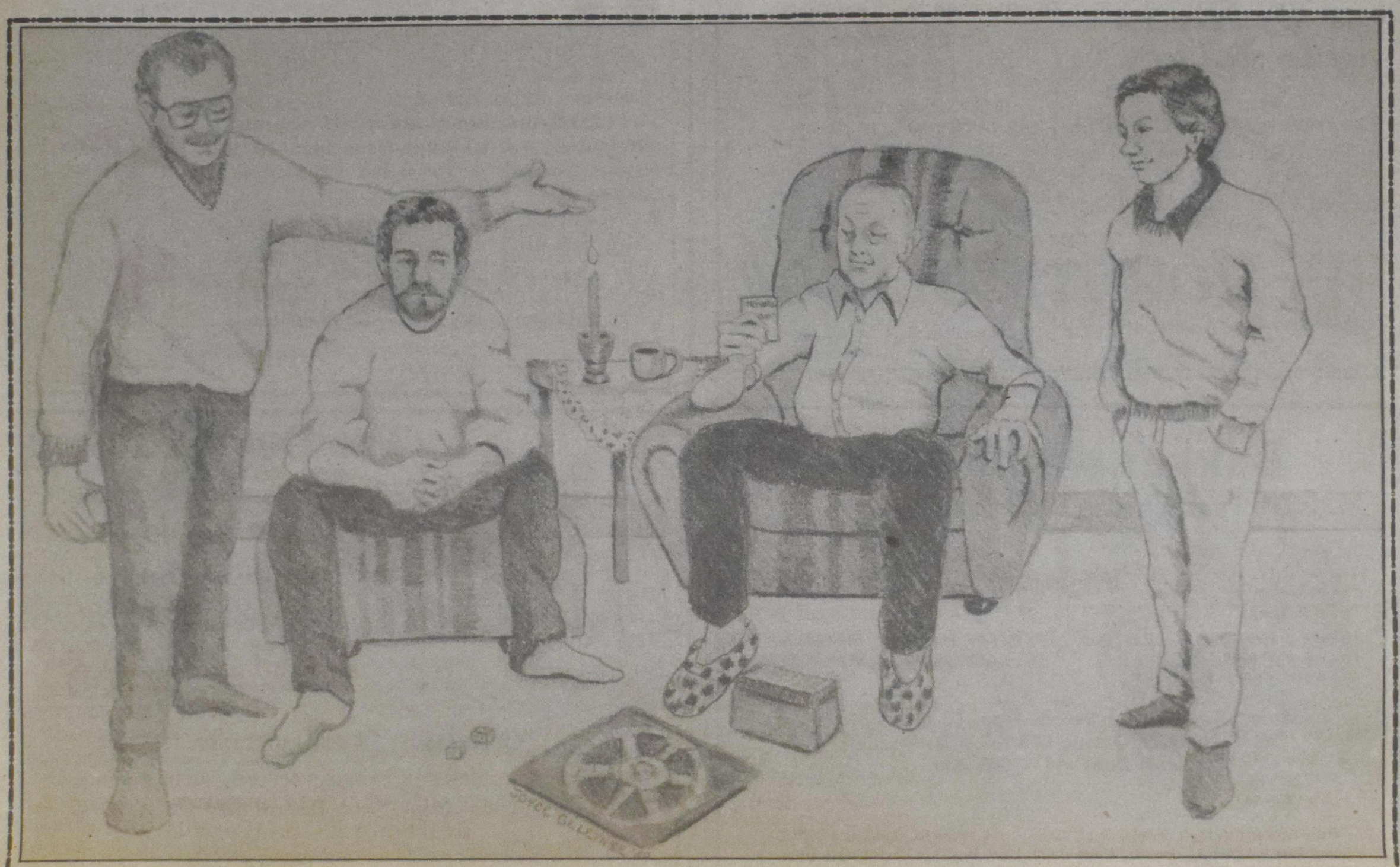
SEASON'S GREETINGS

The light over the chapel



Ron B. DeBoer

Tom didn't ease his foot off the gas as his '78 Ford pulled hard to the left, and although he wouldn't have admitted it to Barbara, he was glad he had put on new Michelins before the snow on these interstate on-ramps had hardened into black ice. He felt Barbara's cold stare but ignored it. Hunched over, he peered through a scraped hole in his side window only to discover he had forgotten to clear the mirror. He watched the orange needle flutter past fifty as he eased blindly into the holiday I-29 traffic.

THANK YOU FOR VISITING SIOUX FALLS COME AGAIN.

Late model Tempos and Cavaliers swished past him and again he thought about the new Michelins, which he replaced every 8,000 miles or so. Those commercials with the babies climbing all over the tires had finally gotten to him after Zachary was born, and he decided right there in the middle of Eyewitness News that he didn't want Barbara sliding off into some frozen ditch on her way to the hairdressers in Orange City.

Arlen had told him he was crazy if he thought a set of tires would save that rust bucket he was driving, and Tom had replied that no car could withstand Iowa salt. Surprisingly, Arlen had nodded to that.

Not very often had Tom been able to let what Arlen said roll off his back. Everything was an issue with his father. When the roads turned into brown slush every December, Arlen was convinced the Department of Highways was involved in some national scam with the Big Three auto-makers. "The lousier the roads, the faster the car wears out," he'd say, leaning forward in his green recliner. "That means big bucks for guys like Iaccoca at Chrysler."

"You don't really believe that?" Tom had glanced at Barbara who always chose times like these to involve herself with whatever Zachary was doing.

"You bet your bottom dollar I do."

His brothers had always been able to laugh off what Arlen said. But then again, Jim and Marv didn't seem to care much about anything anyway, aside from the UPI ranking of the University of Iowa football team and new strategies to become top dogs in the sales world.

Tom flicked the heater on low and settled into the right lane at a steady fifty-five. The shoulders were soft again after yesterday's thaw; dirty snow receded toward the grey-capped fields where half corn stalks — brown and stiff — poked up in the wind. This was a striking contrast to three days ago when they had travelled toward Sioux Falls. Huge white flakes — almost like the ones Barbara and Zachary had cut out at the kitchen table — stuck to trees and formed little caps on fence posts. Somehow everything had seemed fine then. First semester was over at the college, and all the history exams and senior seminar papers were marked. He had even seemed to convince Dr. Marcus at the department's Christmas party of the need for immediate political reform in the Soviet Union, and even though he realized new semesters usually brought sobering opinions from intellectuals like Marcus, he felt it couldn't hurt to impress anyone sitting on the board. He was up for review at the end of the year, and he wanted badly an extension on his teaching tenure.

But that was last week when everything looked like a calendar turned to December — rosy faces, kids sledding, blue smoke rising lazily from cold brick chimneys.

He felt a chunk of grey salt bounce under him. It was snowing again — thin, white spikes that knifed through the windshield.

"I don't see why you let them bother you so much." Barbara's voice pierced through the swishing on the highway. She clicked off Madonna on KG-95's year-end countdown, and that told Tom she meant business. But he didn't want to talk. Whenever he leaned his left elbow on the door handle and played with his lower lip he didn't want to talk. Barbara remembered enough from freshman psychology to be able to read body language, but she persisted anyway. "You don't make it very fun for Zack and me, either, Tom. Christmas is traditionally known as a time of year when people have fun."

Tom signaled left and passed a Nissan pick-up driven by someone who looked like Arlen. Strong, rounded shoulders, no neck, and nothing but a half inch of grey crop over his whole head. Fine slush sprayed from the Nissan's tires, and Tom turned on the wipers.

"Everyone has a great time, and you just sit around looking glum the whole three days. Even when we play Trivial Pursuit. You take it all so seriously. You have a riot playing that game at faculty parties. Same game, different Tom."

The Canton cut-off was only two miles ahead and Tom was glad. He'd far sooner stick to the country roads, and the Nissan was right on his tail and that bothered him. He liked his space.

His mind played back Arlen's voice: "The college boy doesn't even know what a seismologist is, Reta. After that quake in California in October, yet. Even I know what a seismologist is." The words, punctuated with that yellow grin, made Tom burn.

He eased the wagon onto the off-ramp, this time slowing down. Good old Highway 39 to the state line. South Dakota would be gone and he could relax in Iowa again. Even though it was less than an hour from his parents' house to his own, the state line made the separation more distant.

"He's just kidding around — trying to have a good time. You've got to loosen up around him."

"It's that voice he uses. And that look. He always thinks he's right. You know he only asked me once the whole three days we were there how teaching was going. Once, Barbara. Then did you hear him carrying on with Jim and Marv about selling vending machines? Vending machines, Barbara." The snow had stopped, but a hard grey sky promised more before supper. It was whiter here than it was in Sioux Falls; ploughed furrows were capped and mailboxes were still topped with a hard, crystallized crust.

"He feels more comfortable talking about that stuff. It's something he understands." Barbara glanced into the backseat where Zachary was sitting, sleeping, his head hanging toward his shoulder.

"The whole time, it's Jim this and Marv that." Tom eased down to 50. Canton was a cop trap, and he'd heard on the radio that the state troopers were going to crack down on speeders over the holidays. "Did you hear him ranting and raving about Marv's promotion?

Continued on page 7 ...

"And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all mankind together shall see it."

The faculty, staff, and students of Dordt College wish you joy and peace in this season, as we celebrate the birth of the King.

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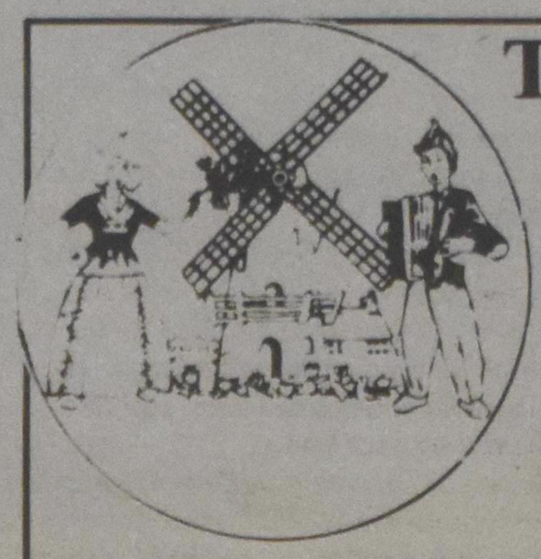

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The light over the chapel

... continued from page 5.

Sales supervisor at Vender's. Fat raise and everything. And pretty soon he'll be able to move up to sales trainee and go to Des Moines or Cedar Rapids. Think about it, Barbara. He's going to be paid big bucks to train people to sell vending machines."

WELCOME TO IOWA A PLACE TO GROW.

"He's worked hard and done well for himself." Barbara weighed her words carefully. She didn't need Tom yelling and waking up Zachary. "Janna says he works all night — sometimes not getting home until after 10."

"Fine. But what's he doing? He's selling vending machines, Barbara. His whole life revolves around catering to the laziness and convenience of the average consumer."

He's making good money. Why do you have to be so critical?"

"Is that what he'll say when he retires? 'I made good money.' You think he'll look back and say he's made a difference? To him, making a difference means getting candy-bars and chips into dorms and arenas." He hated it that Barbara always seemed to side with his own family.

"Don't be so hard on him. Not everyone can be a college instructor."

"I don't mean that, Barbara. Come on, you're misunderstanding me. All I'm saying is that he looks at me and thinks my job is nothing. Teaching college kids about apartheid in South Africa is useless. You can see it in their faces when we talk about it."

"And that's why you walked out of Trivial Pursuit last night when your Dad teased you about seismologist?" She took off her shoes and slid her feet up onto the dash.

"It's just the way he says it. It's like he'll take any opportunity to show me up. And Marv and Jim, too. Any time I ask a question or say I don't know something, one of them's got to throw in some remark about me being a college boy. I'm expected to win at any game that requires thinking. I don't know why, but somehow they're always the underdogs. I'm lousy at Trivial Pursuit, yet Dad's always got to blurt out something about how he can't believe he beat me."

The Ford pulled to the right, rounding the curve that by-passed Rock Valley and joined Highway 75 to Sioux Center. Wet snow was settling on the hood and roof, creating drops that left wet tracks down the windshield. For some reason, Tom stared at these drops snaking down the glass, mapping a route with no apparent destination or order. At first it was amusing to him to watch the lines intersect, cross over, or run into each other, but when the map got too complex, he felt a strange satisfaction in flipping on the wipers and clearing the windshield. It meant creating order.

Tom flicked on his lights. It would be dark before they got to Sioux Center. Nights fell hard and cold in Northwest Iowa, and he didn't want to take any chances. He thought about turning on KG-95 again and catching the top hits on Countdown '89; he thought about changing the subject — maybe talk about what Barbara wanted to do for the rest of the holidays. But he couldn't.

"You know the thing that bothers me most?" Barbara had pulled out *Cosmopolitan,* and Tom waited for her to look up. "They'll talk about something like those student riots in China, and how the government has no business suppressing the protests for democracy. All it takes is for me to say one thing, just one word or viewpoint they don't understand, and they won't talk about it anymore. Or Jim and Marv will look at each other a certain way like I'm trying to show them up or something."

"Now you're getting paranoid." Barbara rolled up the magazine as a paperboy would and stuck it under the seat.

"Maybe I am, I don't know." He glanced into his rearview mirror and saw a row of headlights coming down the hill. All heading for Sioux Center for the Praise Worship Service at the college chapel, no doubt. He didn't feel much like going to the chapel after all, but he couldn't admit that to Barbara now. It had been a good excuse to leave Sioux Falls and get back home.

Strangely, as he watched car after car appear on top of the hill then descend like carts on a roller coaster, he felt pulled toward Sioux Center. And it was more than just a pull to high-tail it back after three lousy days with Arlen. He felt one with the cars in front and behind him — as if they were in fact one roller coaster, guided, with the same route and same destination. Like the shepherds on their way to Bethlehem.

He wanted to say more. He wanted to tell Barbara how it wasn't fair he was barely making enough money to live on for doing something he thought was very important. He wanted to say it made him sick to think Marv was making a salary three times the average Joe, and doing it selling vending machines. And most of all, he wanted to say how he wished he could play two-on-two with Arlen, Jim, and Marv, like when he was a kid. How they'd take a dip in Morely's pond afterward to cool down, even though Marv teased him that there were water snakes in the mud. He wanted to say maybe he should take more interest in Jim and Marv's lives, and maybe get to know them again. And most of all, Arlen.

But it didn't matter anymore. A sense of peace washed over him as the first lights of Sioux Center blinked ahead. They would pull up to the house, unload, dress Zachary in those Osh Kosh overalls he loved, and head for the chapel. And afterwards, they'd have a coffee and one of those little pale sugar cookies they always served after church, and maybe he'd see Dr. Marcus and comment on how he was eager to get back to work next semester. And maybe Phil and Marsha would come over after the service and play cards, or just talk.

Tom put his hand on Barbara's knee and smiled at her. She mumbled something like "It's about time," and began pulling her shoes on again.

"You in a better mood now?"

He smiled again. "Yeah, I'm sorry, Barb."

"You need to sit down and talk to them about it. They probably don't have a clue why you're acting so strange. Why don't you give your Dad a call when we get home."

Tom was nodding his head. "Maybe I will."

Highway 75 widened into four lanes as they passed the first houses leading into town. It appeared as though yesterday's thaw had not melted Sioux Center. Front lawns were still covered, sidewalks seemed to have been recently shovelled, and pillows of snow sat neatly on garage roofs. Everything was white.

Tom turned onto Fourth Avenue and the reflectors on the two wagon wheels at the road flashed at him. The living room window was yellow, and he felt warm as he accelerated up the driveway.

He turned off the ignition and sat for a second with both hands on the wheel. He leaned toward Barbara and said simply, "Home."

Snow fell lightly, coming into view in circles around the streetlamps. Families hoping to get a good seat crunched down already packed sidewalks, hurrying toward the campus chapel, guided by a huge spotlight which skimmed the sky, a tradition begun years ago by a college president who wanted to get the attention of farmers and neighbouring towns like Hull and Orange City. It seemed to Tom to be a very fine idea.

Ron De Boer teaches English at Chatham District Christian High School, Chatham, Ont.

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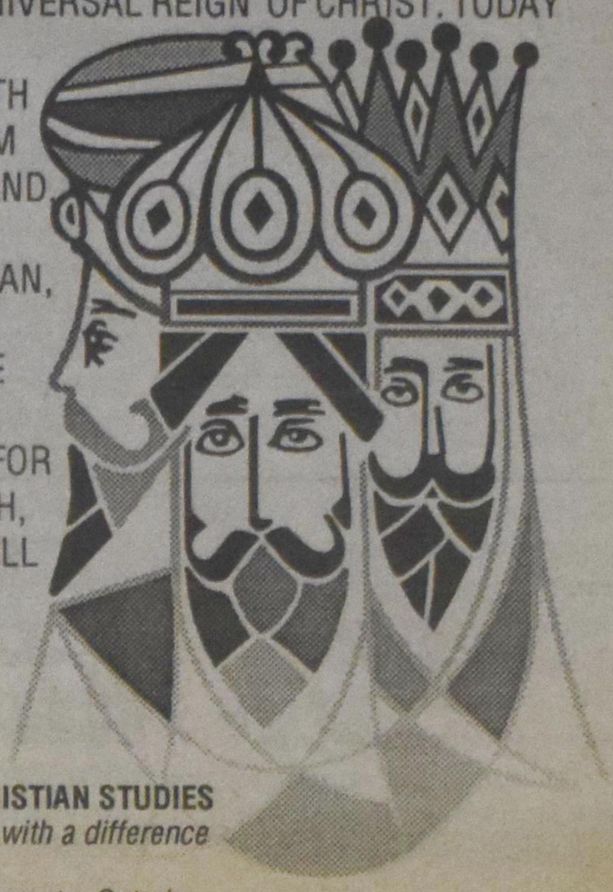

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The Christmas I cried

Avis MacLean

I was seven that year and like all the rest of the Grade 2 class was caught up in the magic of Christmas. Why did I cry? For years I didn't fully understand the reason for my tears. Nor did I understand why some of the audience thought our nativity pageant ruined while others considered it the most true Christmas of all the Christmas pageants they had ever seen. You be the judge.

But this is not my story as much as Ralph's.

He was a big boy for nine years old and should have been in Grade 4. Besides being big, he was clumsy, slow moving and slow thinking. He was well liked by all the children, especially the younger ones — he acted as their natural protector.

This is the boy who taught me the true meaning of Christmas.

Miss Murray, after much thought and tact, gave out the various parts for the pageant. I was to be one of the little angels. Ralph wanted to be a shepherd with a flute but Miss Murray said she had a more important role for him. As the innkeeper, she reasoned, he would not have too many lines to remember. His size would make his refusal for lodging to Joseph more impressive.

How we practised and practised, each child feeling his importance to the success of the evening.

The auditorium filled with mothers, dads, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles and various town people for the yearly extravaganza of shepherds with crooks and flutes, kings with crowns and beards, angels with halos and wings and a whole stage full of squeaky voices.

But no one in the audience or on the stage was more caught up in the magic of that night than Ralph.

The play progressed without any major mishaps until Joseph appeared walking slowly, tenderly helping Mary, to the door of the inn. He knocked hard on the wooden door.

Ralph was ready and waiting. "What do you want," he cried, pushing the door wide open with a rude gesture.

"We are looking for lodgings."

"Look for them elsewhere." Ralph looked straight ahead but he spoke vigorously. "The inn is full."

"Kind sir, we have asked everywhere in vain. We have travelled far and are very weary."

"There is no room for you in this inn." Ralph looked forebidding.

"Please good innkeeper, this is my wife Mary. She is heavy with child and must find a place to rest for the night. Surely you must have some small corner for her. She is so tired."

Ralph relaxed. He looked down at Mary. There was a long pause, so long the audience became tense with embarrassment.

"No! Begone!" Miss Murray whispered from the wings.

Ralph just stood there.

Three times Miss Murray prompted him, each time louder than the last. We angels crowded around the open door.

At last Ralph automatically repeated the words he had learned in those long weeks of practice. "No! Begone!" Joseph sadly placed his arm around Mary and turning, started to move away.

The innkeeper did not return to his inn. He stood there watching the forlorn couple, looking perplexed: his mouth opened, his brow creased with concern, his eyes filled with tears.

Suddenly this Christmas pageant became different from all the others. "Don't go, Joseph. Please don't go," Ralph called. "Bring Mary back." His face brightened with a big smile. He stretched out his arms to them. "You can have my room."

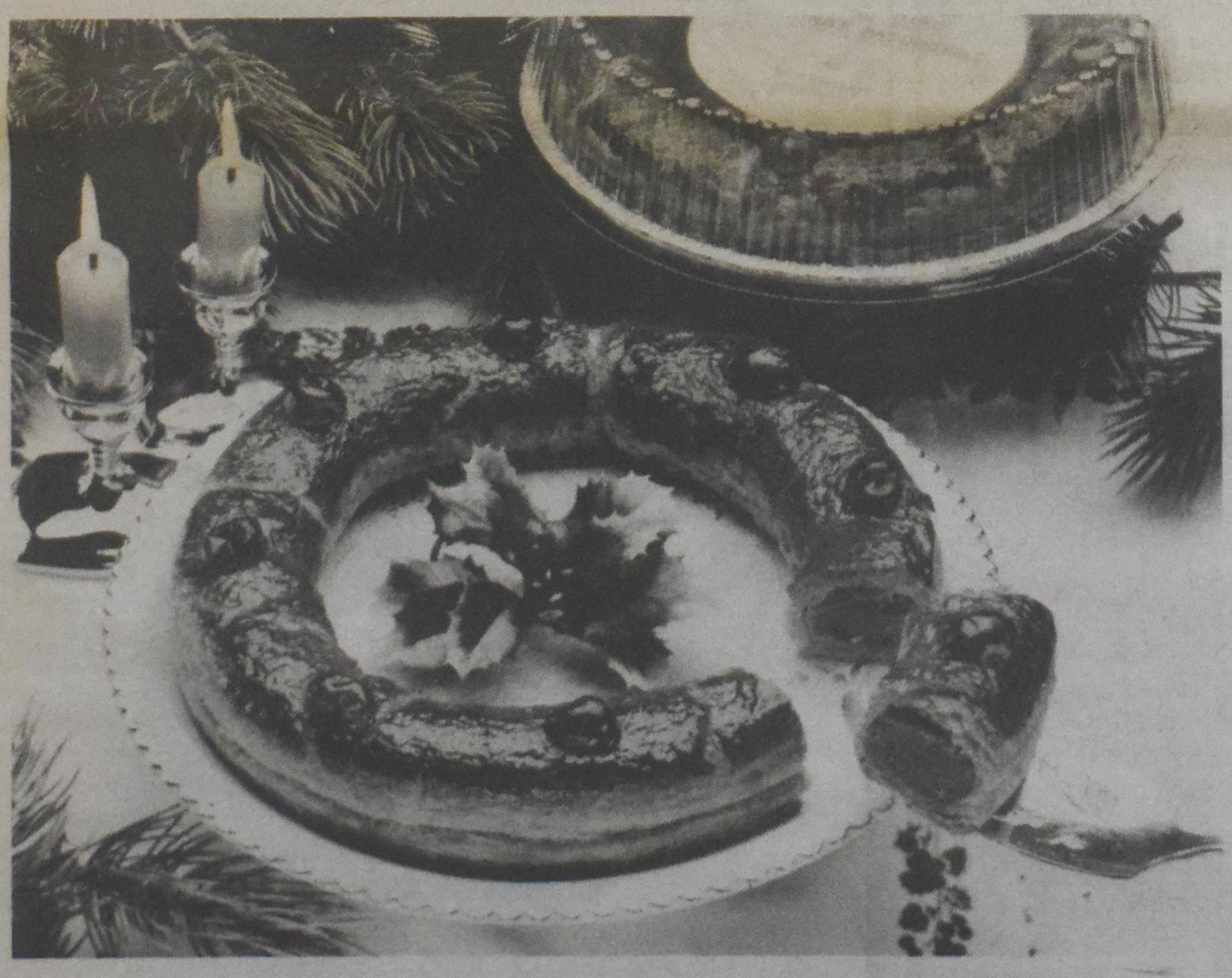
And the little angel felt the tears streaming down her face.

"The Glory of God shone all about them."

Avis MacLean is from London, Ont.

ENJOY

A Holiday Tradition



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Brampton	Dick's Food
Brantford	The Dutch Shop
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Burlington	Dutch Shop
Cayuga	IGA
Cayuga	Hogetarp Meat
Cayuga	Andy's Meat
Dundas	Link's Deli
Dunnville	Werger
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Fenwick	Ridderkhoff
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Sheffield	Brown Barrel Deli & Gifts
Smithville	IGA
Smithville	Foodland
St. Catharines	Ramakers Dutch Imports Inc
St. Catharines	Stamford Delicatessen
Stoney Creek	Delca
Stouville	Stouville Deli
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Brockville	Boers Delicatessen
Cobourg	Cobourg Meat Market
Keene	Keen General Store
Kingston	Heidi's Deli
Kingston	Golden Rooster Deli
Manotick	Holland Shop
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Chilliwack	Ed's Deli
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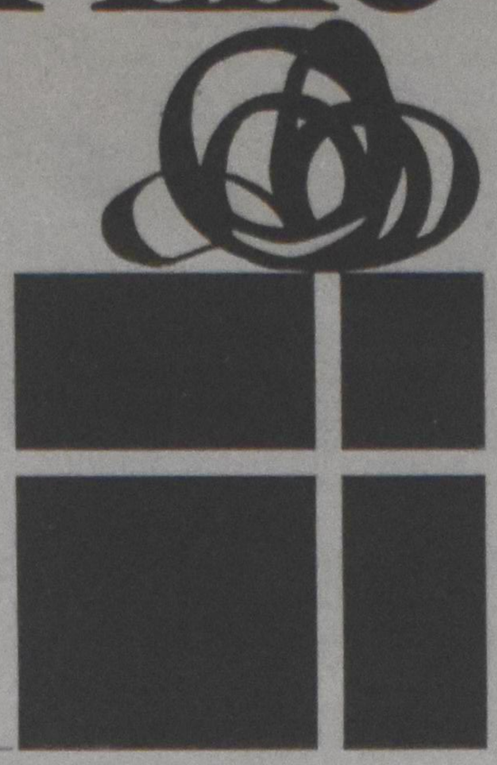

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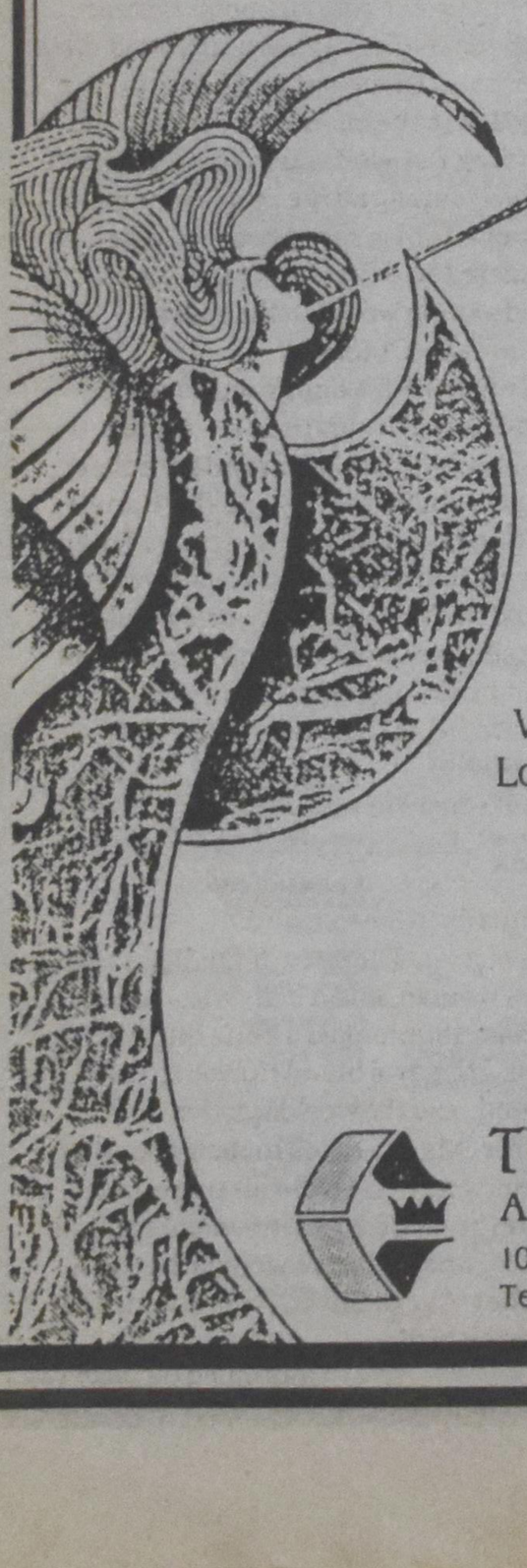

May the Good News of Christ's birth fill your hearts this Christmas and throughout the coming year.

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The Fifth Reich: a Christmas story from history

Wayne Brouwer

We all need something to believe in. There are enough false hopes and broken dreams in our lives to keep us more than cynical, even during the Christmas season. Thousands of generations ago, a Christmas story was told that offered more than a little to believe in. It was told by a Jewish prince called Daniel to the great king of Babylon Nebuchadnezzar, as he explained the king's dream:

In your dream, O King, you saw a huge statue of a man reaching right up to heaven itself. The bright metals gleamed and sparkled in the light; a dazzling sight from which you couldn't turn your eyes.

For a while you just stood there looking at it, awed like the rest of the people of the world who fell in worship at its feet. Then you noticed something: the head was a lot brighter than the rest of the statue. In fact, it seemed to be made out of solid gold!

As you look downward, the rest of the statue was strong and powerful, but the chest and arms were only made of silver, and the belly and thighs were fashioned out of bronze. At eye level, looking at the statue's knee-caps, you saw that the legs were just made of simple iron. By the time you got down to the feet, you could see that the artist who had sculpted the statue was running out of metals all together. In the end, he had to use a lot of clay.

But still it was an impressive sight! For a long while you just stood there looking at it, particularly that spectacular head of gold.

Suddenly, out in the distance, somewhere on the horizon, beyond the place where the nations ruled and the peoples lived, a rock began to roll! It was only a pebble at first, skipping along as if tossed on a pond by a boy. But as it moved, it seemed to gather strength and speed. It was a rock, but it was growing like a weed! It wasn't pushed, yet still it seemed driven! In a matter of moments, the rock came crashing across the plain, and smashed into that brilliant sculpture.

You watched in horror as that fine piece of human craft was pulverized into dust. There wasn't even a chunk of gold left large enough to tuck into your pocket and run. Even if there had been, you would have had to be quick in getting to it, for the rock that rolled, destroying the statue, began to grow even faster! In just seconds it had become a small hill; and in a very short while, it expanded into a huge mountain that covered the whole earth in its friendly grasp.

Now what's it all about, O King? Let me tell you the story of Christmas! Let me outline the kingdoms of the earth, your mighty kingdom of gold, my Lord, and the conquering civilizations that will follow you.

And then let me tell you about the final kingdom, the fifth kingdom, the Kingdom of God, which will make the others look pale by comparison!"

The rest, as they say, is history!

The splendor of a golden king

In 630 B.C. a baby boy was born. Assyria ruled the world, and the child had to be kept safe from the roving bands of Ashurbanipal, King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

The tiny baby's father named him "Nebuchadnezzar," a prayer asking his god to protect his young son as an heir to the kingdom he was about to create.

When the boy was 20 years old, his father put him to work in Babylon restoring an old temple devoted to the god Marduk. The boy fell in love with the god and the city, and spent the rest of his life making the name of both resound throughout the world.

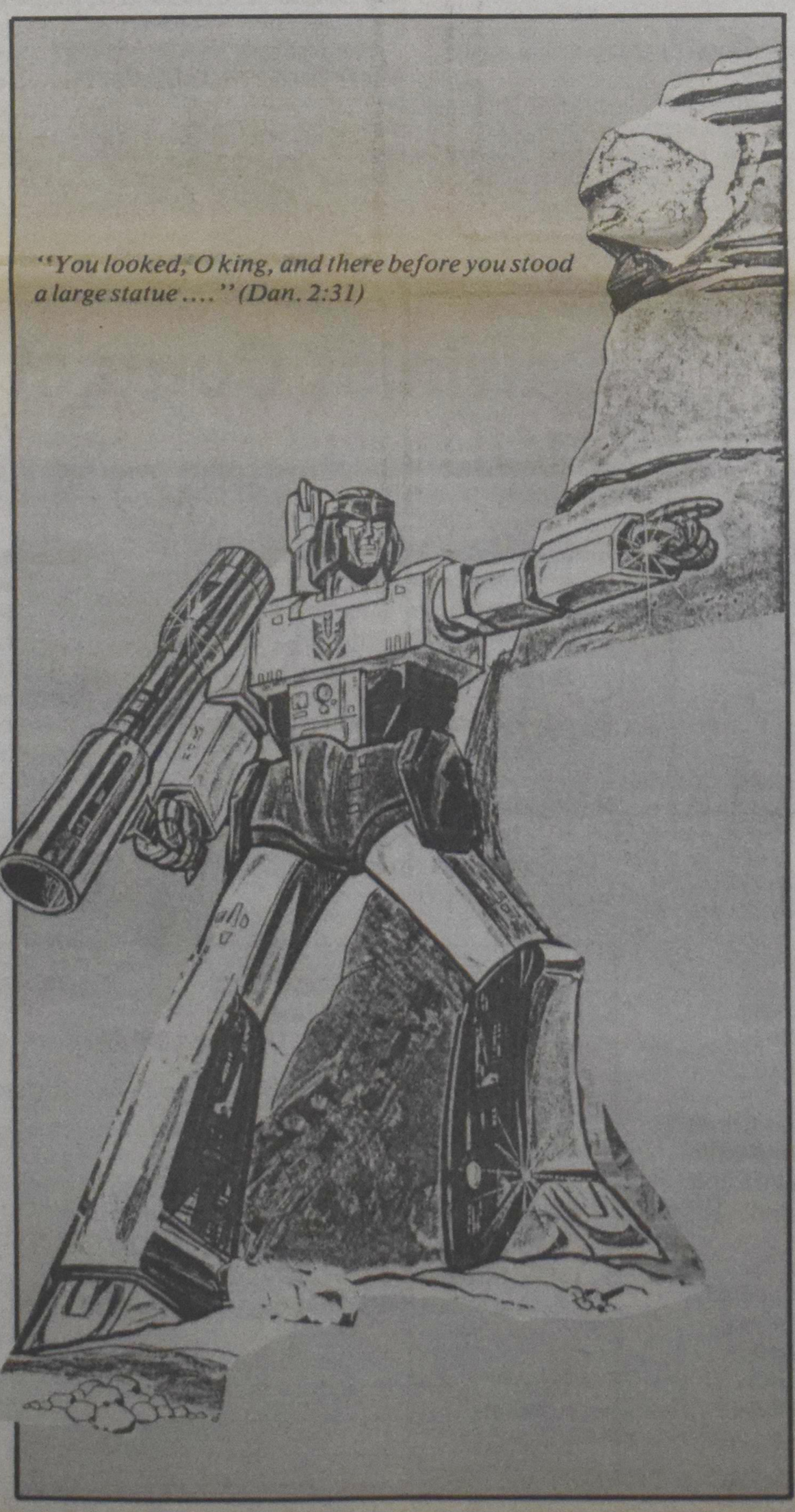
Babylon became the most splendid city in the ancient world. A wall 56 miles long surrounded it, a wall so wide that a chariot pulled by four horses running next to one another could race around the top. A bridge was built over the mighty Euphrates river at the heart of the city, and a tunnel 15 feet wide and 12 feet high was dug under it.

By the time the boy's father died on August 16, 605 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar had proved himself a worthy soldier. He finished the conquests of the kingdom and came home to complete the glories of Babylon. As he mounted the throne, he prayed to Marduk: *At thy command, O merciful Marduk, may the house that I have built endure forever, may I be satiated with its splendour, attain old age therein, with abundant offspring, and receive therein tribute of the kings of all regions, from all mankind.*

And, indeed, it seemed as if Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon would live forever. Every brick in the city bore the words: *I am Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon!*

A 650-foot high skyscraper, taller than the pyramids of Egypt, lifted itself over the city. On its terraces trees and flowers and shrubs of every kind grew, and young maidens of the harem wandered naked for the pleasure of the king. Not content with the drabness of brick, Nebuchadnezzar overlaid each one with a gleaming porcelain tile. His famous Hanging Gardens, splashes of green that seemed to descend from heaven itself, became renowned throughout the world as one of the seven Ancient Wonders.

Marduk was god! Babylon was heavenly! And Nebuchadnezzar, King of Kings, Lord of Lords, would rule earth forever! The "Age of Gold" crowned his empire!



"You looked, O king, and there before you stood a large statue ...." (Dan. 2:31)

The prophetic life of a silver king

But when Nebuchadnezzar was about 55 years old, another child was born far away to the east. King Astyages, ruler of the Medes and overlord of the Persians, had finally allowed his daughter to marry. A short while after the wedding she became pregnant. On the night that she gave birth to a son, King Astyages had a dream. In his dream he saw the child grow. He saw the child becoming a powerful warrior. And he saw that the young child would one day defeat him in battle.

Kings are frightened very easily, and King Astyages was terrified by the dream. He sent for his trusted officer and ordered that his grandson be put to death. But the officer had a kind heart, and he smuggled the child out to the country, killing a young sheep instead. The blood of the lamb satisfied old King Astyages.

Meanwhile, the child was cared for by a poor shepherd and his wife. Ten years later, the child had become a handsome boy. He was extremely gifted, "blessed by the gods," many people said. Old King Astyages, not knowing who the young man was, took his grandson back into the palaces and trained him as a warrior.

In 550 B.C., young Cyrus, as he was now known, defeated his own grandfather on the battlefield and went on to conquer the world.

In October of 539 B.C., just 23 years after the great king Nebuchadnezzar died, the soldiers of Cyrus diverted the Euphrates River and sneaked into Babylon in the middle of the night. By morning Babylon was in ruins, and only Daniel, among all the king's wise men, remained alive, saved because he had predicted Babylon's defeat when God's handwriting wrote on the wall at Belteshazzar's feast.

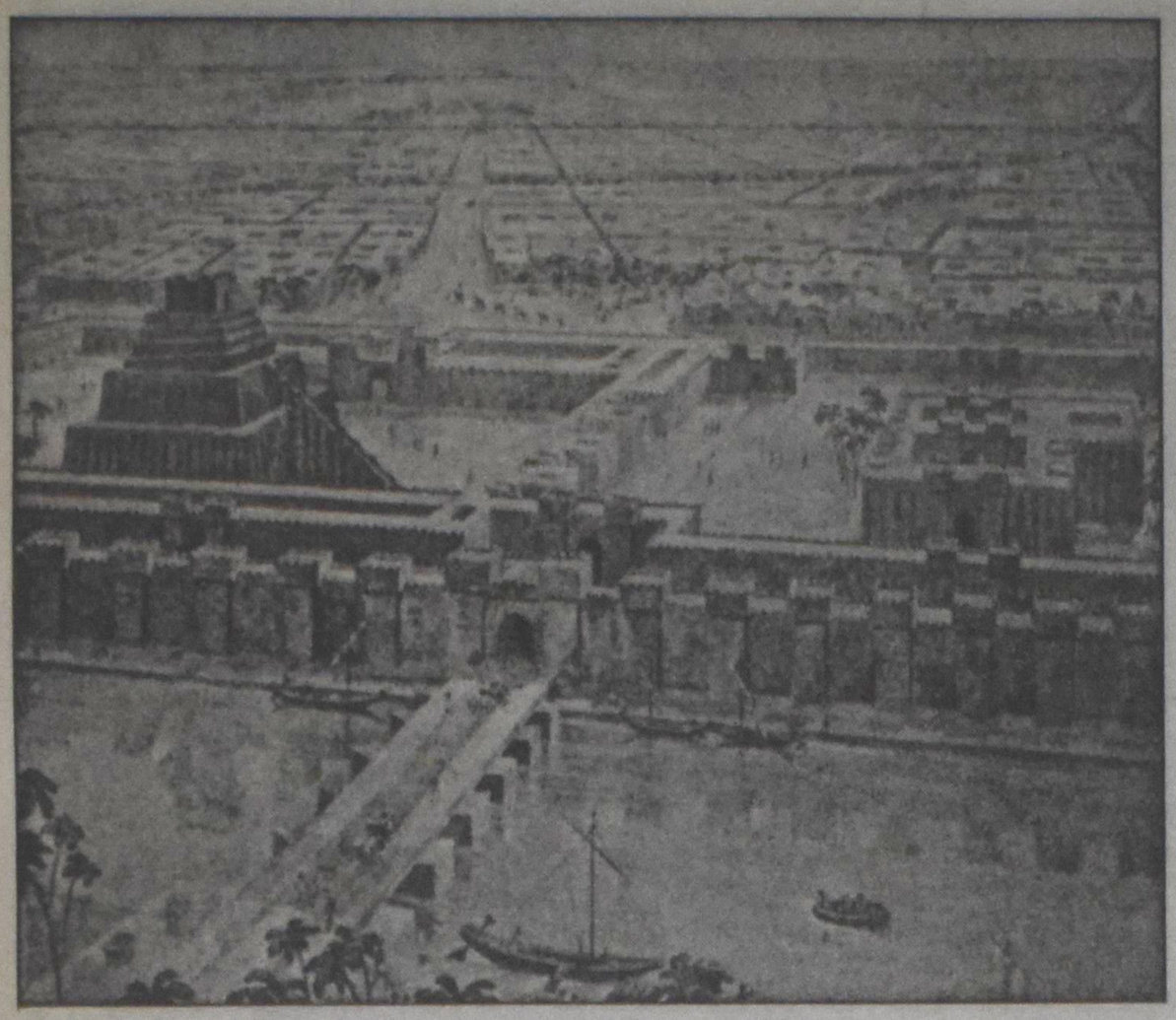
Cyrus ruled, a handsome man, greatly loved by his peoples. He sent the Jews back to Jerusalem and gave them gifts to rebuild the city and the Temple. Philosophers and priests declared that a new era had begun. Cyrus the Great would live forever. The world would become one under his kind rule, and all would know peace on earth as he reigned, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords!

But somewhere in what is now the Soviet Union, as Cyrus added one final piece to his realm, he defeated a wandering tribe known as the Massagetai. The ruler of this little band was a woman, and when Cyrus captured her son, she plunged a knife into his chest. His royal blood flowed to the ground, and the world watched in horror. Many prayed to their gods that Cyrus would rise from his tomb and unite the world for all time, but his flesh rotted, and his bones were eaten clean.

The "Age of Silver" was doomed to be tarnished!

Continued on page 12 ...

The Fifth Reich continued



This painting by Maurice Bardin (1936) shows Babylon as it may have looked during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II from about 605-562 B.C.

... continued from page 11.

The legendary wonder of a bronze king

But another bright star was on the horizon. Over in the western reaches of Cyrus' great empire, a rough and rowdy soldier was making a name for himself. Philip of Macedonia liked fighting. He like drinking. He liked gambling. And he liked women.

He already had many wives when he met a young woman named Olympias. She was wild and she was beautiful. In a rage of passion he made Olympias his wife and even tried for a time to be faithful only to her.

But when she bore a child in 356 B.C., she told a strange story about him. In her words, on the night of her marriage, a thunderbolt had plunged down from the heavens and struck her womb, setting her on fire. The child was not really human, and certainly not the son of Philip. He was a divine miracle, a wonder-child, who was destined to rule the world forever.

And young Alexander lived up to his mother's legendary stories. He tamed a horse no one had ever been able to ride. He left the field of battle because it wasn't fierce enough, and went out to fight lions hand to paw without a knife or any other weapon. To his friends he complained: "Father will get everything done before we are ready, and will leave me and you no chance of doing anything great and important!"

When Alexander was only 20 years old, Philip was assassinated and the young man began his world conquest. Like a god in human form, he marched across the face of the earth. Persia first felt the scourge of his sting, and the mighty kingdom of Cyrus disappeared forever. Asia Minor, Egypt, Central Asia and even the far reaches of India quickly fell under his control.

According to the legends, Alexander wept in his tent at this point in his life, bitter because there were no more worlds for him to conquer. By the time he was 30 years old, he had become the Lord and Master of the Universe, controlling the destinies of every major civilization on earth.

At the age of 32, he issued a decree that all peoples worship him as god. On his 33rd birthday, Alexander was with his administrative officials in Nebuchadnezzar's old city of Babylon. During the night, at a party held in his honour, Alexander drank himself to death.

The King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the divine Ruler of the Universe, born out of a legendary miracle of the gods, was dead because of a foolish human addiction.

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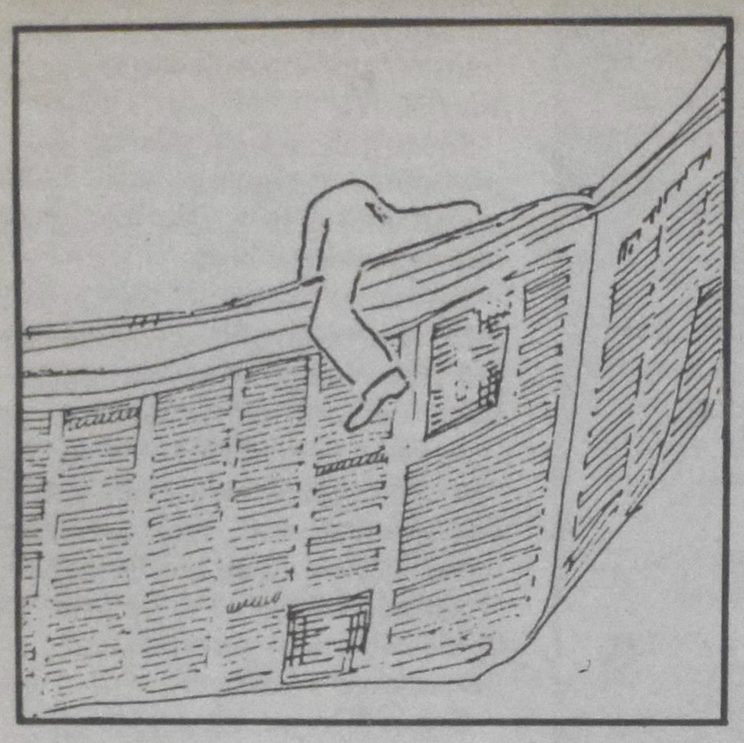
But new winds were stirring in Rome, next door neighbour to Greece. On September 23 in 63 B.C., a prosperous family in the countryside southeast of Rome welcomed an infant son into the family. Gaius Octavius, they called him, but the world would give him even greater names.

When he was 12 years old, he delivered a speech at his grandmother's funeral that moved the audience to tears. From the time he was 18, he lived under the shadow of a sword. His life was in danger from those who wanted to control an inheritance left to him by the great Julius Caesar. And the intrigues of the palace threatened to end his life at an early age.

Somehow (many claimed it was because of his devotion to the ancient gods), he survived all his attackers.



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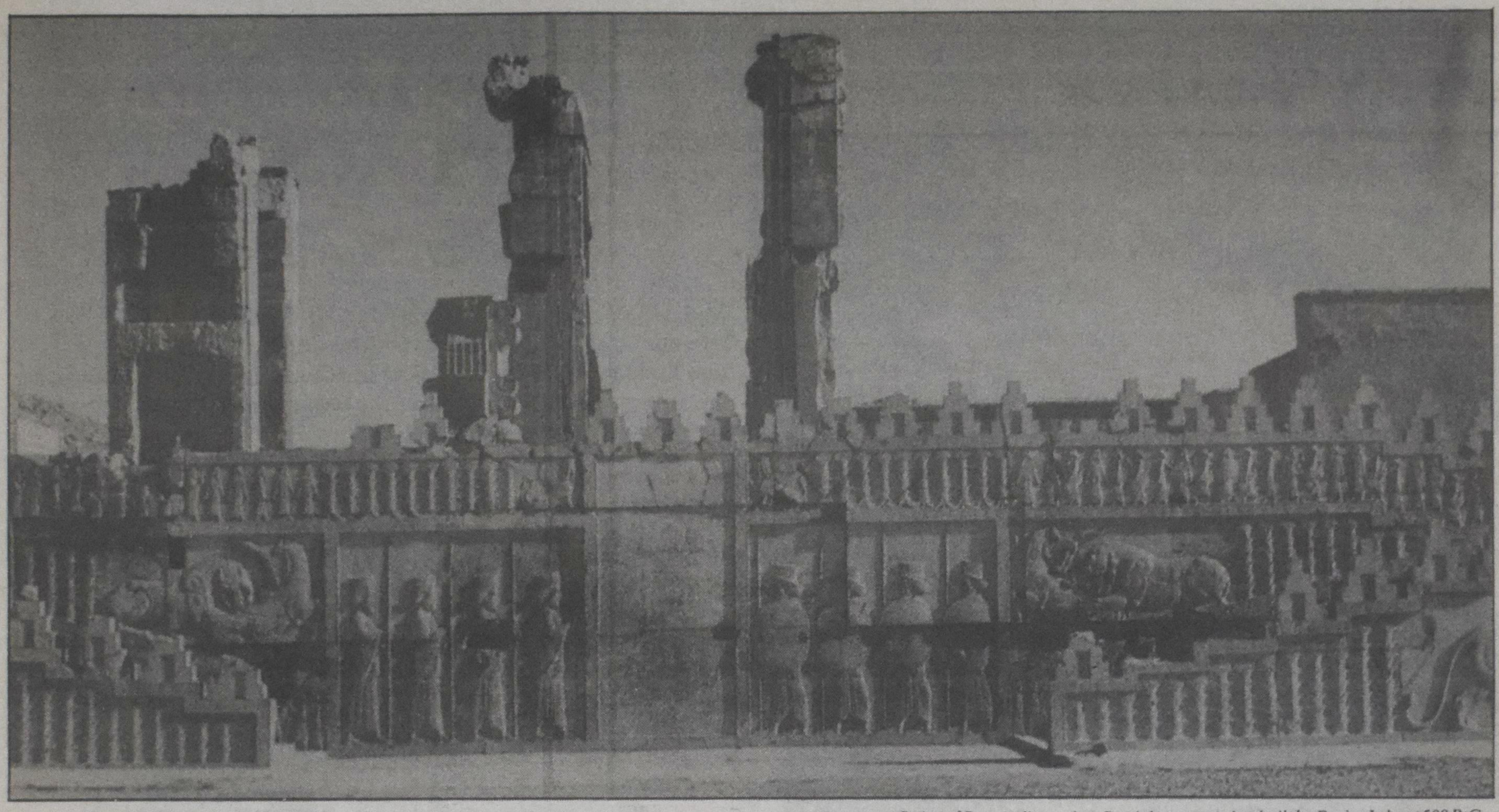

Ruins of Persepolis, ancient Persia's greatest city, built by Darius I about 500 B.C.

The Fifth Reich

When he was 36 years old, the Roman senate called him to be the "First Citizen" of the Empire, and gave him the name Augustus: "Supreme Ruler."

This was quite a shock, because until that time, only the gods could be called "Augustus." But thus he ruled, Caesar Augustus, consolidating an empire that people knew would last forever. His birthday became a world-wide holiday: all the businesses would shut down and people gave each other presents in his honour. Musicians wrote songs about him, songs which were sung at worship services devoted to him. He was hailed as "Prince of Peace," and "Saviour of the World."

With the power of iron, he molded together what had been a kingdom of clay. King of Kings and Lord of Lords, mighty Caesar Augustus ruled, bearing up on feet of iron the weight of the massive empires that had preceded his. No human power had ever been more extensive; no kingdom of nations had ever reached so far.

An insignificant birth

But in the barren hills of Palestine far to the east, the great Caesar Augustus was setting in motion the amazing story of yet another kingdom. Peace exacts a heavy price in soldiers and weapons. Armies need supplies, and supplies cost money. So Caesar Augustus told everyone in the empire to go home in order that the population rolls could be completed and the taxes collected.

A young girl, with a strange and wonderful story to tell about an angelic messenger from God and a pregnancy that had no human cause, sat atop a little donkey. The man who was to be her husband led it along winding paths to an ancient town near the Judean wilderness.

This was a town filled with powerful scenes from history: in these fields Ruth the Moabitess gathered the grain to support her mother-in-law Naomi, and fell in love with the kind and wealthy Boaz. The flocks of sheep in this countryside had once been followed by a young boy with a sling and a harp. His deeds brought him into the palace of the king, and his songs would be sung for ages in praise of the Creator God of the universe.

But this night, Bethlehem was neither cozy nor comfortable. The bustle of crowds, and the orders of Roman officials, charged the air with business and chaos. In the madness of the moment, the young woman and the stalwart man were kicked from door to door, till the only rooming house that would welcome them was home to the animals of the fields.

That night another male child was born. And though the outcast shepherds came to see him, and later a few strange figures from eastern lands who babbled about a sign in the heavens, there was nothing remarkable about this young boy. He certainly didn't seem to be in the same class as Nebuchadnezzar, or Cyrus the Great, or Alexander the Great, or Caesar Augustus, who brooded on the world throne in Rome.

Alexander the Great. A Roman copy of a marble sculpture after Lysippus.

The Rock that rolled

Yet in the fulness of time, this tiny pebble of a man, not fashioned by human hands or sexual designs, created a kingdom on earth that would last a thousand thousand times longer than any of the great empires of the ages. For the baby Jesus, born that night, had no desire to gleam in the shiny gold of Babylon; he had no ambition to polish the tarnished silver of Persia; he had no hope to reflect the glories — bronzed Greece; and he had no aspirations to sit on Caesar's throne in Rome, ruling a kingdom of clay with a rod of iron.

But in the majestic simplicity of God's love, Jesus Christ announced in human terms what it was to be part of the Kingdom of Heaven, a kingdom that had brought all others into being, a kingdom that would watch them all wither and die. And in the power of service, and in the strength of spirituality, and in the might of love, Jesus Christ set in motion the Empire of Grace that receives citizens from every tribe and nation and people and tongue on earth.

Nebuchadnezzar died only decades before his kingdom coughed out its last sick breath. Cyrus handed over his nations to lesser men, who watched his kingdom itself lessen. Alexander drank himself to death, and his empire was washed away in bloodshed. Caesar Augustus brooded on his Roman throne and died in cynical skepticism, knowing that people are beasts and no person could tame the human heart.

But Jesus, who commanded no armies and built no cities, who charged no taxes and left no monuments, remains at the centre of the universe. Time itself is dated from the year of his birth, and today the many empires of the world nod a begrudging acknowledgement to his existence. The beauties of Babylon are only dust blowing in the wind; the mysteries of Persia are lost legends; the vast expanses of Greece have been whittled down to a modern problem; the might of Rome is merely an historical memory. But more than one-third of the five billion people on earth bow the knee to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Nebuchadnezzar's grave is forgotten; Cyrus' burial site is unknown; Alexander's tomb is lost in the rubble of the ages; and Caesar Augustus long ago returned to the chemicals of the soil. But there is no marker to show where the body of King Jesus lies. He alone of the mighty kings of earth, lives and reigns alive forever and ever. And the Rock that rolled has become the mighty mountain of the Kingdom of God.

The "Fifth Reich"

In 1933, Germany passed the "Enabling Act" and Adolph Hitler came into power. He was determined to set up a kingdom that would last for a thousand years. He would call it the "Third Reich." The first, in his estimation, was the Holy Roman Empire of the Middle Ages; the second was the Germany created by Bismark in the 1800s. Now it was the time for the Third Reich, the greatest of them all.

But Nebuchadnezzar's dream, the dream of the image representing the "Reichs" of this world, should have warned Hitler that only the "Fifth Reich" would last. Only the "Fifth Reich," the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, begun with the angel's telegram to the shepherds, begun with the announcement of a royal star, begun in the unimpressive cattle barns of Bethlehem; only this "Fifth Reich" could command the allegiance of peoples for an eternity. For all the other kingdoms and Reichs depended on how godlike a man could become; they were based upon ordinary men who tried to be Superman. But the Fifth Kingdom, the Fifth Reich, depended on how human God could become; it was based upon the might of Heaven unleashing itself on Earth in the limitless power of redeeming love.

Is that what you see in Christmas? Isn't that something you can believe in?

Wayne Brouwer is pastor of First Christian Reformed Church, London, Ont.

Augustus, the first Roman emperor. Statue by an unknown sculptor who lived during Augustus' reign.

A Blessed Christmas Season and a Prosperous New Year

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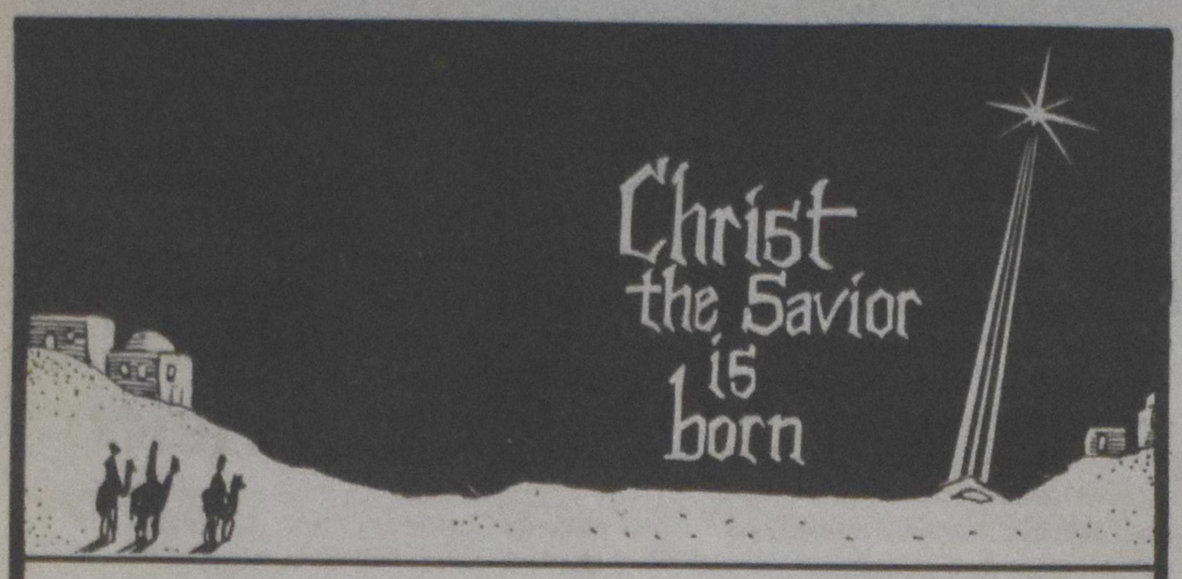

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Transitions

Cathy Pater

For five small children it had been a long day. The fluffy snow threatened to come over the top of our little rubber boots as we hopped into the steps imprinted in the snow by our parents ahead of us. My mother hugged my baby brother close to her as the chilly November winds swept across the open fields.

We had come from the warm farm house which now lay behind us. In its spacious living room we had been treated to our first meal in Canada. That morning, the farmer and my father had picked us up at Union Station in Toronto after we had travelled for three days by train from Halifax. It was during the era of the early '50s migration that we had come to Nova Scotia on an immigrant ship from the Netherlands.

It was a relief to leave that part of our journey behind as we entered Toronto. In Union Station I was overcome by the vast heights of the cathedral-like ceilings and the enormous size of the station. I had never been in a building so big. Somehow, I felt sure that heaven must be a little like this. We had found an empty wooden bench among the crowd, and had waited for my father who had come to Canada six months earlier. Finally, we could complete the last lap of our long journey to a new world.

It was essential for a family wishing to immigrate to Canada to have a sponsor, otherwise entry would be denied. In many cases it was a farmer who would do the sponsoring. He could use the manpower and usually had some form of housing to accommodate the new family.

As we followed our parents through the snow, I could feel the sharp wind biting through my home-made clothes. Except for my baby brother, my mother had sewn winter coats and pants for four of us, ranging in age from four to ten. Cut from the same pattern and cloth, a heavy, brown suede-like material, it wasn't difficult to tell we were one family. There was a slight distinction in the boys' pants. They puffed out at the sides of the knees.

Hatchery home

Lunch had revived our energy and we could hardly contain ourselves as we reached our final destination — a hatchery, our new home! It was a long, low block building no longer used for the purposes intended. At the end of the hatchery built into a T-shape and raised from the ground was the original chicken coop — the penthouse by today's standard! High narrow windows divided into smaller panes provided light on three sides giving the coop a very colonial look.

We entered our new home by way of a set of recently constructed wooden stairs gracefully adorned with a railing at the top. Cautiously we stepped onto newspapers carefully placed upon the newly laid linoleum floor. We removed our boots and set them neatly in a row onto more newspapers. At the far end of the room a black, wood cooking stove crackled a melody of welcome.

With the help of other immigrants, my father had converted the chicken coop into something beautiful. On the shiny linoleum floor stood a new chrome kitchen set. The chairs were beautiful! The chrome shone! Dutch furniture tended to be designed of dark, heavy wood with dull-coloured, plush seats; these chairs boasted seats of bright yellow plastic! Showroom furniture has never affected me the same way as that first chrome kitchen set. Thirty-seven years later, my parents have that same table and chairs, but have relegated them to the rec room after many years of use.

My father proceeded to open a new cupboard that had plywood doors. It reached from floor to ceiling, and in that cupboard was everything a child could have wished for. On every shelf, from the bottom and as far as I could see to the top, was food — packaged food, food in cans, food in boxes. All the cans had such pretty pictures pasted on them illustrating their contents. I had never seen food in a can.

My father was as excited as we were as he pointed to and explained what everything was. Not having seen his family for six months and having prepared a new home for us in that time, he was ecstatic to be with us again.

Off the main room which served as kitchen and living room was a small bedroom, also with new flooring, with just enough room for my parents' bed and the baby's crib. Here too, a colonial window added a dimension of light and coziness. Each little pane had been carefully painted with love and care.

To the back of our penthouse, adjoining the hatchery at the T-shape, in a narrow windowless room, was the remaining bedroom. Nailed to the walls, were bins originally used for feed. With hay packed into them they were magically transformed into comfortable beds. Years later, my sister would tell her children that just like Jesus, she once slept in a manger.

The remaining area of the hatchery had been sub-divided into four apartments — two on each side for other immigrant families. A long, dark corridor ran down the middle of the building. It somehow gave me the opposite feeling of what I had experienced at Union Station.

Evil influences

Once the initial excitement of our family reunion had settled, my father called us four older children around the new chrome table. With the serious look that fathers seem to pull out of the air, he explained that each day we would be receiving a newspaper after it had made the rounds of the other immigrant families. It would be beneficial for us to look through the paper, he advised, to become more familiar with our new country and to learn the language; however, we must never read the comics.

Not knowing what comics were, he opened the paper and with a raised eyebrow pointed to the offending page. Even though we were in a new country now with many blessings, we must be very aware of wicked influences. Comics, he felt, were one of them. All four of us nodded our little heads in assent. Card playing, he continued, was also something in which we must never participate. Again we nodded our little heads, even though we had never seen a deck of cards.

Many adjustments had to be made in the following weeks and months as we became more and more accustomed to, and often surprised at, our new homeland. There were the many humourous situations as a result of implementing a new language. We read the paper faithfully, acquiring new words each day; however, I was always puzzled as to why only Presbyterians were hit by cars. Patiently, my father explained that the word was pedestrians when I questioned him about God's motives.

The absence of a bathroom posed its own problems. The only inside plumbing we had was what we were born with. A tilting outhouse, centrally located, served the needs of five families. The paper, proclaiming the death of more Presbyterians, had been cut into squares and neatly stacked inside for use as toilet paper. One dark night on his way to the outhouse, my older brother collided with a pig. Nature ran its course, and my brother high-tailed it back to the penthouse. After that, he somehow always bribed one of us to accompany him at night.

We experienced, too, the difficult and sad times that make a major transition worth fighting for. Romans 5:3 tells us that hardships are not meaningless; rather they produce character, and character produces hope — a hope that everything we had been through, all the joys and sorrows, did indeed have meaning and purpose. A hope that it was part of God's eternal plan for us.

Today the hatchery is gone. The farm is gone — gobbled up by multinational giants with insatiable appetites. Many years have passed since we embarked on that exciting adventure to a new land. Times have changed, people have changed and *we* have changed. But hope in our God never changes. And God himself is changeless. Our lives will continue to be part of his eternal plan.

Photo: courtesy Cathy Pater

The author with her mother and siblings in front of the "hatchery" home.

Cathy Pater is a homemaker who lives in Erin, Ont.

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the wounded soul to cure;
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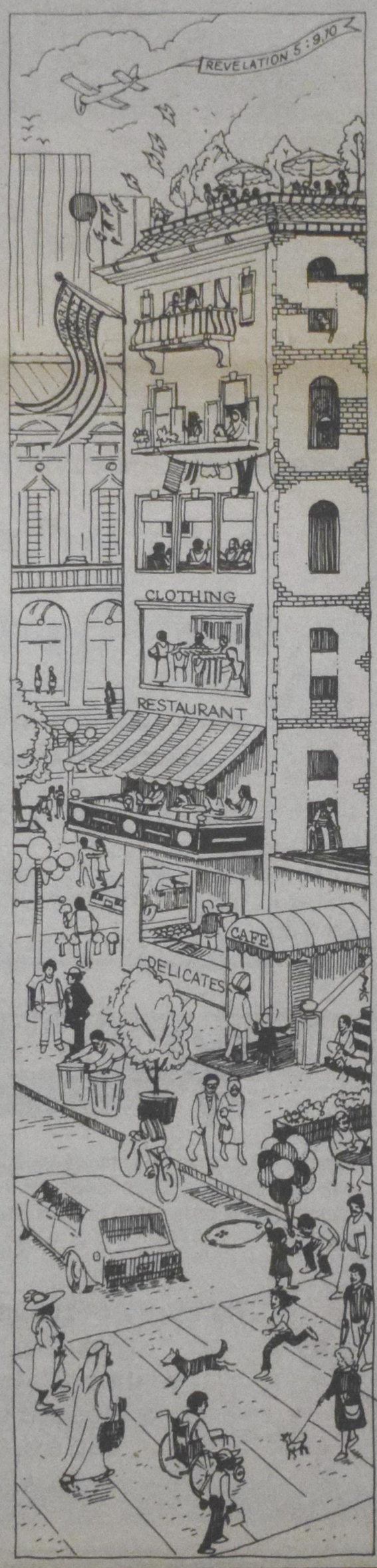

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Send me an angel continued

Berta Hosmar

With a sigh Linda looked at her watch and noticed with dismay that it was only two o'clock in the afternoon. That meant she had another three hours to kill before supper and she didn't have a clue what she was going to do. She had walked the city streets all morning and had discovered that the Christmas displays in the store windows had not lifted her sagging spirits but had depressed her even more. She was now sitting on a park bench on this unusually warm November day, watching the squirrels foraging for the coming winter and listening to the fallen leaves rustling in the grass.

She had to admit that this brief holiday weekend in the city, away from her job and friends and relatives, had been a mistake. Instead of losing herself in the hustle and bustle of one of southern Ontario's large cities and enjoying being pampered in the lap of luxury in one of the city's better hotels, she discovered that she felt desperately lonely and even sadder than a few days ago.

Let's face it, she had reason to feel so God-forsaken. What did she have to look forward to? Here she was — a relatively young career woman of 33. She loved her job as a nurse and got along well with her colleagues. She had friends in various towns and cities, lived in a cozy apartment, drove a good car and she could afford expensive holidays.

Her married sisters and brothers did not live too far away and her many nephews and nieces adored Auntie Linda.

She usually presented a happy face to the world around her; she had an outgoing personality. Even her relatives and friends seemed to believe that the raw wound in her heart after the sudden death of Rob, her husband, now five years ago, had healed. Several of her well-meaning friends were trying to "set her up" with a suitable marriage partner. They could not understand why Linda was not at all eager; and she wasn't going to tell them what had worried her so much during the past few years and why that was one of the reasons she had not been the least bit interested in another relationship. Not with this threatening medical condition hanging over her head! And now, just two months ago, her worries of what might happen to her had become a fact. She had had the surgery her doctor had been recommending to her for three years. The surgery that had made it impossible for her to bear children if she should ever meet somebody she could love again.

"It's dangerous to wait any longer," the surgeon had told her; and then seeing the despair in her eyes, he had dropped his professionalism and become fatherly. "Believe me, Linda, you are a pleasant, pretty girl. You'll marry a widower with children one of these days and then you'll never miss your own." Miss her own! What did a man know about the ache in her heart everytime yet another baby was born to her friends or relatives? Come to think of it, did other women who were bearing one child after another have any idea what it was to be childless? To know you would never be able to feel life in your own body? Not to hold a warm, squirmy bundle close to your breast? To buy numerous baby gifts and attend baby showers and to hold other people's children and then hand them back to their mothers?

"They are all flaunting their motherhood," she thought bitterly and unreasonably. She was now at the point of avoiding church services if she knew there was going to be a baptism. Even the occasional single rose on the pulpit, celebration of a new life added to the congregation, caused her almost bodily pain. After Rob's death her relatives and friends had surrounded her with their love. But slowly she had begun to realize that she was now a widow, a single woman who could not talk about husbands and diapers and formulas and teething, while her friends had all started to have families. She had slowly withdrawn from those friends and had met others, mostly single career women. She had only been married to Rob for two years and a baby had not been one of their priorities. Rob was a little younger than she and had a few more years of medical school ahead of him. Lots of people started a family when they were in their early 30s, so they had told each other there was plenty of time.

When she had gone to her doctor for a check-up last week he had noticed how depressed she was. "That's fairly common after this type of surgery," he had tried to reassure her. "It will pass. Take a cruise or go south for a week." That's what she should have done instead of shopping for Christmas presents and listening in the stores to endless Christmas carols. The words of "Away in a manger" and "Oh little town of Bethlehem" already brought tears to her eyes, for they all talked about a Baby. And although she knew that Baby had become a man and loved her dearly, that knowledge meant nothing to her now. Her heart was frozen and empty. God had heaped sorrow upon sorrow on her while he had blessed others so abundantly.

"Good afternoon, what an extraordinary lovely afternoon for late November, perfectly delightful," bellowed a female voice behind her. With a start, Linda looked up. Well, she was getting company. An elderly lady, dressed in a fur coat and accompanied by a poodle, sat down beside her.

"It's too hot in this coat!" the lady shouted again, and Linda noticed the hearing aid. Funny how she seemed to think that Linda, too, might be hard of hearing. The lady took off her coat and displayed a woollen sweater and cardigan, worn over a woollen dress, which undoubtedly had long sleeves.

"When you have old bones like me, you need a little heat!" cried the lady, noticing Linda's look. "A pretty young thing like you doesn't have that trouble. My name is Miss Milly, short for Millicent, and you may call me Miss Milly although I'm 91 years old." A

Continued on page 18 ...

Send me an angel

... continued from page 17.

bony hand was offered to Linda and in spite of herself, she smiled and briefly forgot her sombre thoughts. Was she expected to create a shouting match? Then so be it. "I'm Linda, and I'm 33," she yelled.

Luckily there were no other pedestrians in the park; but let's face it, Linda thought, this funny old character created some much-needed diversion.

Linda noticed the bright red spots on the lady's cheeks, the painted fingernails and the jaunty scarf around the scrawny, aged neck.

"Good for you," she thought appreciatively. This lady apparently possessed a fighting spirit and would not let old age get her down. Linda had to add little to the conversation. Miss Milly did all the shouting.

"Come here often when the weather is nice! I own that old house behind those trees. Perfectly delightful place! Rent the upstairs and the tenants keep my part clean and do my laundry. Do my own cooking. I was in the hospital last year. Busy with angina. The priest wanted to give me the last rites. I startled the nurses and the doctor. Opened my eyes and said, 'Young man, I'm too young to die, come back when I'm a hundred!!" Miss Milly laughed uproarishly and almost lost her upper dentures in the process.

"What are you doing for a living?" she wanted to know next, and Linda told her about her job. She discovered that, if she looked straight at Miss Milly and spoke slowly, she did not have to yell so much. Apparently Miss Milly was good at lip-reading.

"How lovely, what an interesting job, perfectly delightful!" cried Miss Milly enthusiastically. "My job was similar to yours. I was a secretary in a doctor's office for 45 years. Knew all the patients. Outlived two doctors! One of them did a lot of surgery, typically needed by males. You know what I mean! I never told mother. She had rather Victorian principles and would have been horrified that her daughter knew about those things! So I told mother my boss took out gallbladders!" Again Miss Milly chuckled, and then grabbed her dog's leash when the poodle was trying to take off.

"Monsieur Poirot wants to go back home. Isn't that a perfectly delightful name for such a tiny dog? I love Agatha Christie books and I simply adore her detective Monsieur Poirot! But I must go home. I'm old; I can afford to be bold. Would you be willing to have a cup of tea with me since you are not expected anywhere?"

Miss Milly looked hopeful and suddenly Linda saw her for what she was, a brave but lonely old soul.

"Why not?" she thought after a moment's hesitation.

"That would be perfectly delightful!" she shouted, using Miss Milly's favourite expression. Ten minutes later she found herself in a different world.

The woodwork in the spacious rooms was dark and small chandeliers hung from the ceilings. The rooms were cosy, filled with antiques; and the chairs were embroidered with intricate needlework.

"Mother made all these," Miss Milly informed her. "She simply adored embroidering. We lived here together for many years. Perfectly delightful. I have one sister left who lives in Florida, but everybody else my age has disappeared into the woodwork."

Linda had to think for a minute before she understood that Miss Milly meant that her friends and relatives had died. She was mildly shocked but then had to admit that this expression suited her hostess.

Miss Milly was busy preparing a real English tea and got some fine china cups out and her old silver. Linda noticed the crucifix on the wall and the picture of the Virgin Mary.

"It's perfectly delightful to have a guest for tea!" cried Miss Milly happily. "It does not happen very often."

"Poor old soul," thought Linda and slowly her bitter heart defrosted somewhat and a trace of compassion moved in. How lonely it must be when you were this old and you were the only one left of your generation. It was nice to become old, but not nice to *be* old.

During tea Miss Milly's exuberant mood changed somewhat and Linda noticed she ate and drank very slowly.

"I have this growth near my stomach, nothing malignant, but my doctor, an old fuddy-duddy of 70, tells me I'm too old to be operated on. Positively maddening! When it gets me down I ask the Virgin to help me. She always seems to refer me to her Son!

"This morning I felt a little sorry for myself so I asked him to send me an angel. He's got lots to spare!" Miss Milly chuckled again. "I believe in helping him a bit, so I went out and met you. You're my angel for today my dear! And when I saw you sitting there with your head down, I knew you needed an angel too! Was I right, or is all this Christmas falderal on the radio and in the stores going to my head?"

Sudden tears welled up in Linda's eyes. *Before they call, I will answer,* she thought.

Spontaneously she took the aged hands in her own. "Yes, you are right; you're my Christmas angel!" she agreed.

Berta Hosmar is a short story writer who lives in Whitby, Ont.

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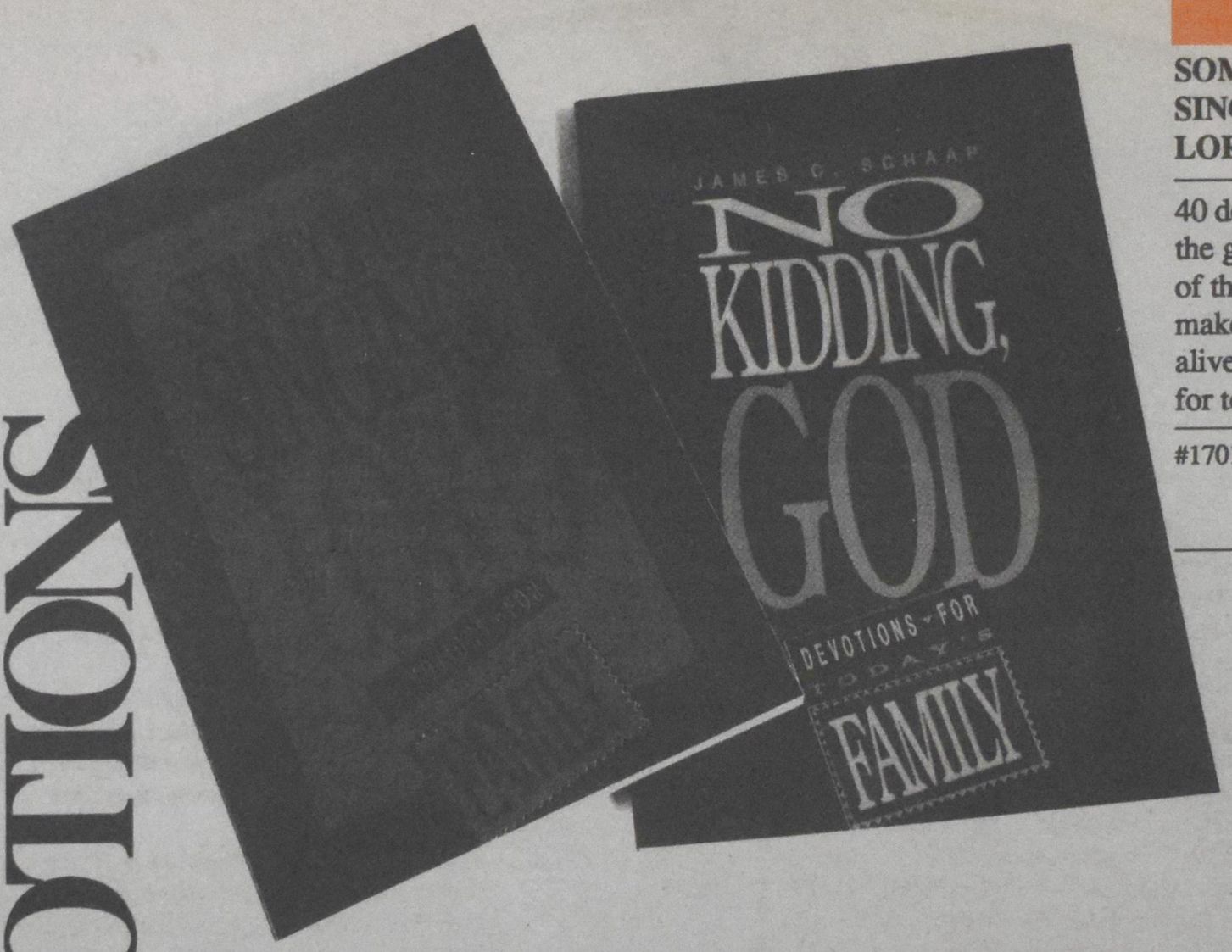

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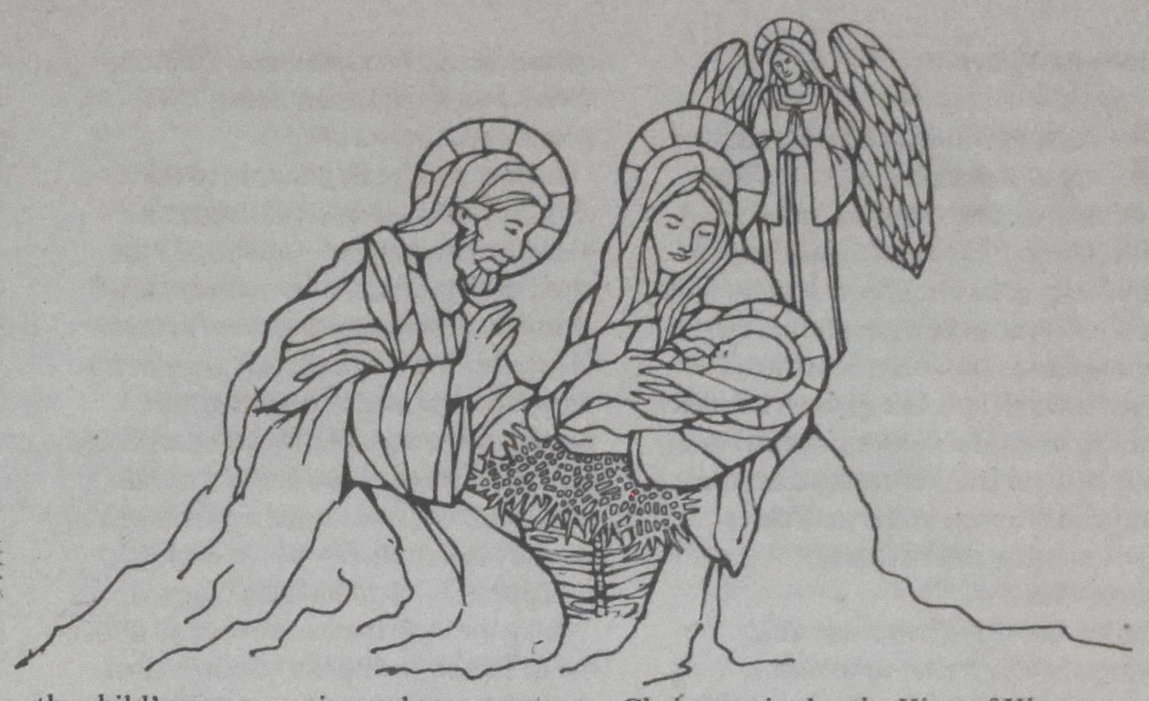
Perspective on Christmas in a poem by T.S. Eliot

Frank Sawyer

T.S. Eliot was born exactly 100 years ago. He was to become one of the most influential poets of the first half of our century. His works are heavy with philosophical accents, using a juxtaposition of images while synthesizing two or three themes all at once.

His works are frequently lyrical meditations with dramatic portraits, dialogues and opaque allusions. They give the reader a mosaic of impressions. Mixed throughout, one finds things classical and apocalyptic with phrases that shock each other and the expectations of the reader.

Eliot sometimes keeps the meaning of what he is saying purposefully difficult — because he is after more than analytical meaning — by giving considerable space to a kind of subconscious current of cultural, personal, religious and other aspects in almost one breath.



The Cultivation of Christmas Trees

There are several attitudes towards Christmas,
Some of which we may disregard:
The social, the torpid, the patently commercial,
The rowdy (the pubs being open till midnight),
And the childish — which is not that of the child
For whom the candle is a star, and the gilded angel
Spreading its wings at the summit of the tree
Is not only a decoration, but an angel.
The child wonders at the Christmas Tree:
Let him continue in the spirit of wonder
At the Feast as an event not accepted as a pretext;
So that the glittering rapture, the amazement
Of the first-remembered Christmas Tree,
So that the surprises, delight in new possessions
(Each one with its peculiar and exciting smell),
The expectation of the goose or turkey
And the expected awe on its appearance,
So that the reverence and the gaiety
May not be forgotten in later experience,
In the bored habituation, the fatigue, the tedium,
The awareness of death, the consciousness of failure,
Or in the piety of the convert
Which may be tainted with a self-conceit
Displeasing to God and disrespectful to the children
(And here I remember also with gratitude
St. Lucy, her carol, and her crown of fire):
So that before the end, the eightieth Christmas
(By "eightieth" meaning whichever is the last)
The accumulated memories of annual emotion
May be concentrated into a great joy
Which shall be also a great fear, as on the occasion
When fear came upon every soul:
Because the beginning shall remind us of the end
And the first coming of the second coming.

Attitudes toward Christmas

As in all his poems, here Eliot is busy analyzing and critiquing, suggesting and questioning. Even the title is curious in its possible meanings.

The first words — "There are several attitudes towards Christmas" — and what follows, hold us in tangible suspension, making us wonder where Eliot is leading us.

There is a childish attitude toward Christmas — "which is not that of the child" — who takes the ornaments seriously, not as ornaments, but as a real reality. Does this imply that the childish attitude is that of the adults, not the children? And is there a double layer of thought in the word child, Christmas being the celebration of the birth of the Child?

Whatever the possible contrasts, leave the child in his or her spirit of wonder, says the poet, for this attitude is better than some already mentioned: the torpid, the patently commercial (as if Christmas can be patented), the rowdy (all of which is adult childishness).

The child who wonders at Christmastime: "Let him continue," says Eliot. This reminds us of the words of Jesus Christ: "Let the children come to me" (Mark 10:14). A child does not use, that is, abuse, Christmas as a pretext for something childish as quickly as adults do.

Eliot then accounts various impressions, but all of them in the context of the surprise of the first-remembered Christmas tree ... and the coming end. Allow the child his or her awe, surprise, expectation, reverence, so that this experience will not be forgotten when the later experiences come: fatigue, tedium, consciousness of death and failure.

And then a little stab in the back of false piety: allow the child her experience of Christmas in order that she will have something better than the kind of adult piety which is displeasing to God and disrespectful to the children ...; for example, when adults take away the child's awe, surprise and reverence for Christmas!

Christmas: the beginning and the end

Let the child continue in a spirit of wonder at Christmas so that when 80 Christmases have passed his joy will remain — and his fear also: "A great fear, as on the occasion / When fear came upon every soul," says Eliot. And when was this? Surely at the first Christmas, as Luke says in his gospel (2:10) concerning the shepherds, to whom the angels announced the good news: "They were terror-stricken." Allow the child her joy and fear, "Because the beginning shall remind us of the end and the first coming of the second coming."

Christmas — Advent of Christ — is not complete without the Second Advent. And the second coming includes judgment. Because the Child of Christmas is also the King of Kings.

It seems to me that Eliot's perspective on Christmas in this poem is realistic and psychologically alert, taking into account the value of the awe, surprise, trust, faith and joy of a child in his or her Christmas experience.

From a theological point of view, Eliot has well-understood the Bible, which does not speak romantically of Christmas, but rather presents the coming of Christ as an event with many implications that will be fulfilled in the second coming.

There are various attitudes towards Christmas. The cultivation of Christmas trees (even though it is not free of distortions) is not the worst. This might even give the child, also when he or she is an adult, says Eliot, a great joy and a great fear ... which are indeed real Christmas themes of Christ come and Christ coming.

Mary's song

anno domini 1988

Lord, the snow is falling once again —
the icicles sing keenly in the wind:
a rabbit runs across the frozen snow
while in my heart I ponder what has been.

Centuries of hope and turmoil now have past.
Some say this was never meant to be
while others explain that all is for the best:
more is gained despite the growing cost.

I do not know. Faith does not always see
beyond the dynasties, the wars, inventions,
megapolis images, university deletions,
churchly rubric, flag-waving negations.

A thousand years ago the pope and king
knelt to welcome in the millennium.
Two thousand years ago they say he came
and is the world more saved or now more lost?

I sing of cultures churning each through each,
an interplay of time and place and change.
I see the vulture yearning for sweet death:
a rabbit cries in pity or in rage.

Icicles are crying in the wind.
My prayer goes out but will it then return?

Frank Sawyer

For the wise and well-off

Christy M. Visser

Grey and run-down and drab, and me in the middle of it all. Here, on Christmas Eve. I feel like an alien. I don't fit into this real life picture of crumbling, grey brick tenement housing and slushy walks and isolation. I don't belong, just as much as the stringy-haired little girl standing about 20 yards away from me does belong. Yet, thanks to my new car that refuses to start, here I sit on a cold bench under grey skies surrounded by this destitute environment.

So I wait for the tow truck and, having nothing better to focus my attention on, I allow my eyes to rest on the lone little girl. She stands quietly on the sidewalk, seemingly oblivious to the cold despite her torn, worn-out jacket. Although she is not facing me, I am able to distinguish part of the dirty old rag doll cradled in her arms. I can't help but quickly consider the steep odds that a new doll awaits her beneath some pop-corn-strung Christmas tree. Does she even know what season this is? She must. Does she care?

Indeed, my heart goes out to the child, standing in quiet solitude on a bleak Christmas Eve. But despite the compassion I feel for her, I cannot fail to notice how beautifully she fits into the scene. She's like the last piece of a jigsaw puzzle which, once in place, perfects the entire picture. Yes, a perfect picture of tragedy. So perfect, in fact, that I feel that sense of compassion I had felt earlier slipping away. She's just a figurine now. A Christmas figurine.

Like the figurines we always set above the fireplace during the holidays. But those figurines stand for something else. They represent family-togetherness and wine and an abundance of gifts. That was what Christmas had always been for me; that and goodness — that sense of "goodwill toward all men" that always pervaded the atmosphere during this season.

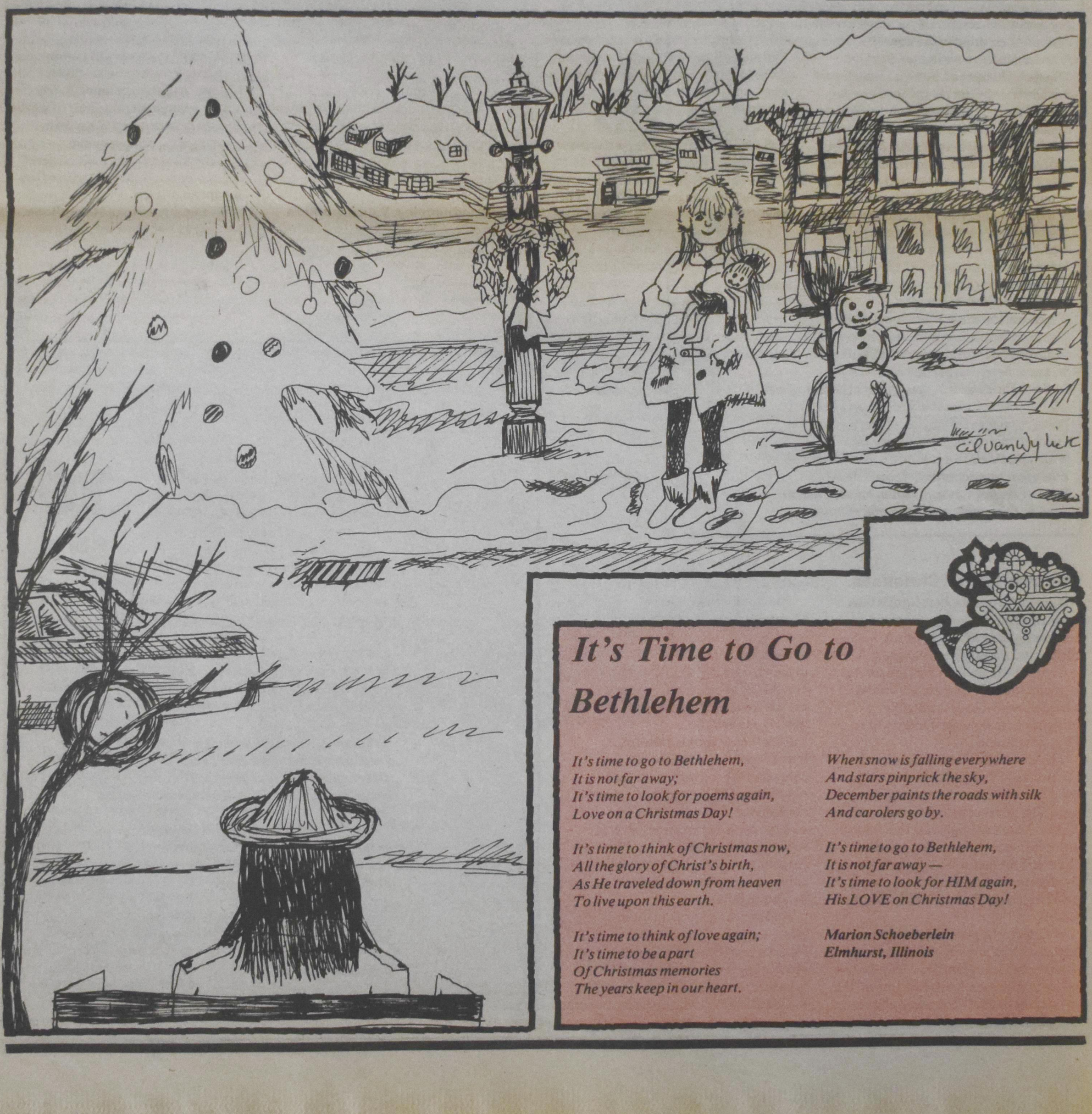
And truly, Christmas is the time to show compassion to the less privileged of society. My family and church and school had taught me well. I had gone door to door collecting cans of food for the poor, I had collected cards for the sailors who couldn't be with their families, had made food-baskets, etcetera, etcetera. Actually, being able to help out others made a person feel good. Being compassionate added an extra dimension to the warmth of Christmas time.

... The warmth of Christmas time. I awake from my day-dreaming and am startled by the stark contrast between my warm memories of past Christmases and the cold, drab reality of this present Christmas Eve. The scene before me seems more real now. The child is still standing quietly, moving only to shift the position of the doll, and the sky is still cold and grey, but I realize now that nothing unreal exists here. There is only something I don't understand.

The girl must have finally sensed my eyes on her because she turned to face me, quietly and calmly. Dark eyes gaze into mine while her arms continue to cradle the precious old doll. She seems so peaceful, despite her surroundings and lack of material well-being. Her gaze confuses me. How can one so deprived be so oblivious to her deprivation? Or maybe she isn't oblivious to it at all, but simply indifferent. This aura of tranquility which encompasses her is unfathomable to me. I, the privileged of society, do not understand. Hot tears well up from deep within me, tears not for her, but for myself. This little girl knows or understands something that I, with my upper middle-class background and present yuppie lifestyle, can never hope to comprehend.

She noticed my tears, walked over to me, and held out her arms, offering me her doll. The compassion ... the compassion is in her eyes.

Christy Visser is a former Calvin College student from Sarnia, Ont. She is currently preparing to study wildlife ecology in Kenya.



It's Time to Go to Bethlehem

It's time to go to Bethlehem,
It is not far away;
It's time to look for poems again,
Love on a Christmas Day!

It's time to think of Christmas now,
All the glory of Christ's birth,
As He traveled down from heaven
To live upon this earth.

It's time to think of love again;
It's time to be a part
Of Christmas memories
The years keep in our heart.

When snow is falling everywhere
And stars pinprick the sky,
December paints the roads with silk
And carolers go by.

It's time to go to Bethlehem,
It is not far away —
It's time to look for HIM again,
His LOVE on Christmas Day!

Marion Schoeberlein
Elmhurst, Illinois

The candle

Laverne Boulogne Van Ryk
December 25, 1942 (11 a.m.)
Dear World,

When I woke, a pain nailed my body to the hard mattress, a body which seemed separate from me yet attached like a heavy burden. I stared up at the beams in the foreign ceiling; alien, hostile beams, separated by a diffuse black-grey. Who knew what vermin housed there! My memories were fleeting, for I resisted any firmness they tried to assert. Why was I here this dreary Christmas day?

I looked through the naked window to assess the day. Dark scudding clouds hung low, and I thought with a detachment foreign to me that rain would mean disaster if it came too soon: all our mattresses and whatever furniture had been allowed, lay on the grass in front of this barrack.

It is Christmas, a reality too enormous to comprehend, with nothing familiar to hold on to. What has happened to all the Christmases in my life? How have I celebrated them? Christmas trees, of course. Large ones, small ones, middle-sized ones. As soon as the candles were lighted Paul's worry began. He posted a boy with a long stick near the tree. A wet sponge was attached to the stick, our only defense against an outbreak of fire. The boy handled it well — once he ended the life of a flaming candle which leaned far out of its territory. Another time a candle burned so low that the flame sought nourishment in the branch underneath. Yes, that boy had a knack for it, and protected all other children who remained peacefully ignorant of danger. They sang Christmas songs, listened to how Mary and Joseph received their first-born Son, a Son whom the shepherds and wise men could adore, who moved and lived their joy.

Vacant children's eyes saw (senseless jabbering suspended) and soaked up the gladness shining through the centuries.

Today? What is glad in today? My body feels immobile, joyless, and I search for another source of energy. The children, yes. They depend on me alone now, and I cannot betray their trust.

December 25 (2 p.m.)
Dear World,

When I finally raised myself this morning, I felt the hard tiles pressing through the thin mattress, the only one that was here when we came. It is fortunate we brought two of our own. Ellen and Yvonne slept on them in the bunks while Danny and Jony slept on folded blankets on the only cot. I put on my dress. Housecoats were out, as far as I was concerned, in this too-public place.

Outside, I tested my ability to squat in one of the toilet cubicles which are built over a fast flowing ditch, and in which two boards are placed across the brown, smelly water.

As soon as I entered the barrack through the backdoor, I heard voices and hurried along the aisle to find Yvonne and Jony sitting on the mattress talking.

"Shh!" I began my first lesson in "keeping quiet," which was going to be a struggle. I had to impress on them the need to be quiet and well-behaved. "There are lots of people in this barrack and we're no longer home. Remember that."

Ellen and Danny were still sound asleep. I sent Yvonne and Jony to the toilets with another admonition when they started to talk again. The last thing I want is to be the first to get into a quarrel because of my children, and children are known to be quarrel producers.

They lowered their voices to a half-whisper as they walked down the aisle. I suspect they are excited about this camp though I'm sure they do not fully realize what it means to be here, to have lost our freedom.

I looked at the chaos of clothes, dishes, cutlery, all thrown into a pile on the tiles yesterday afternoon when we came. I was too exhausted to put order into it.

I heard bodies stir and suddenly longed for a hearty breakfast; I wondered how meals would be arranged.

Ellen woke up too and voiced my longing. "When are we going to eat, and where?"

"I don't know, we'll just have to wait and see."

She jumped down and again I whispered, "Shh, you'll wake Danny and the other people. We're not alone."

"Where are Yvonne and Jony?"

"To the toilets."

"I have to go too."

"Do it right away then, before everyone gets up and you'll have to stand in line."

Ellen walked off and when my distaste once again focused on the mess around me, our neighbour to the right woke up.

"Good morning," I said, and an unfamiliar sensation of embarrassment came over me. I did not even know her name and here we had been sleeping side by side.

She smiled reassuringly as if she sensed how I felt.

"Good morning. My name is Lena Noordam." She extended her hand and I shook it.

"I'm Beth Carter. I hope my girls did not disturb you."

"Oh no," she said easily, and looked down and sideways where her own children still slept. "It's that they're so tired, otherwise they're the noisiest kids I know."

I found Lena easy to talk to and some of my oppressive feelings lifted. At least we had one thing in common: children. Children could cause trouble but they could bind together, too.

There was commotion in the aisle. When we stepped out of our sleeping spots we saw a small group of women gathering near the front. One of them stepped forward and said, "Ladies, we would like to have a meeting of the occupants of this barrack which has been assigned the number three. Children need not be present," she added, I thought unnecessarily.

"My name if Hester Boon and late yesterday our camp commandant, Mrs. Hamel, approached me and discussed certain matters of importance in connection with the government of this camp." I wished she would come to the point for I was getting more and more hungry, but every other woman appeared to listen obediently so I tried to pay better attention.

"Each barrack is to choose a leader, and I believe it wise to begin the process of nomination immediately. I make myself available as nominee, if no one objects, that is. Are there others who will volunteer, or will any of you nominate a woman of her choice? The voting can take place immediately."

This woman was not short of words, I observed, remembering my own reluctance to speak in public.

"The ward leader we elect will be called *hanchu*. This is the wish of the Japanese officials."

We nominated two, Hester Boon, because no one objected, and a woman called Denheer who seemed extremely capable to me, but after voting the choice was Hester Boon. A few women comforted the defeated Mrs. Denheer. "We need you as a nurse, Olga, so we cannot spare you for other things."

Why she needed comforting was not clear to me. The last thing I would want is to be a *hanchu*. Of course certain people are natural leaders, and others crave a sense of importance. I had no doubt Hester Boon belonged to both groups.

"Yes," she said, making her first decision as *hanchu*. "Mrs. Denheer must help us organize some sort of hospital."

Mrs. Denheer nodded. "Yes, yes."

Anxious to begin organizing, Miss Boon launched into an impromptu acceptance speech, but barely had she opened her mouth when there was a loud knock against the open front door. On the threshold stood a woman, comfortably broad, and speaking in a motherly voice, "Ladies, breakfast porridge is ready for Barrack Three. Please go to the dining hall, which is Barrack Seven, across from here." She turned and pointed. "Bring your plates and spoons." She left, and Miss Boon's speech died prematurely for want of an audience — all the women scrambled to their sleeping places to collect plates, spoons and children. I turned to find mine and saw Greta. Glad of a familiar face I went to her. "How did you manage last night? I heard a baby cry for a long time."

"Yes, poor thing. He was so unsettled, but now he's sleeping."

"I'll see you in the dining hall," I said, and felt more cheerful. I knew Beatrice was here somewhere too, and I

Continued on page 22 ...

The candle continued

... continued from page 21.
did not need to guess how she felt, for I knew.

Miss Boon called loudly, "Ladies, after breakfast we'll have a meeting about division of space, and chores, and also about ...." Her words trailed off once again for lack of an audience, and I went to get Danny who was awake by then and looking around curiously. The girls were not back yet.

Today was Christmas. With a shock I remembered the fact but no recognition followed. If I thought about it too much, I would become morose, and I wanted to forget. What place did a feast of peace have in a world of war? I had only just learned to ignore my feelings of loss about Paul.

I found the girls, and we joined the line-up.

"Oatmeal porridge," I said. "At least they decided to give us nutritious food."

"If with 'they' you mean the Japanese, you're mistaken," a woman behind me said. "The Japanese have so far not made any provision to supply us with food. I'm sure they're hoping that by some miracle we prove to be able to do without."

"Oh," I said, more confused than ever. "Where did this come from?"

"There still are some Dutch not interned, and they brought it."

"Oh."

The porridge tasted good and even the children ate without protest; last night's meal had been meagre — only a few coarse chunks of bread.

The dining hall was tightly packed with long wooden tables and benches but there was barely enough room for all the mothers and children. Mother and child. *Round yon virgin, mother and child.* The most precious, closest relationship. How strange it was to sit here at long tables like the boys in the Boys Home.

The children spooned steadily and when I had finished my porridge I wondered if there was more. The haphazard provision of our porridge made me think that lunch might not be a sure thing.

Yvonne and Jony had emptied their bowls and began to giggle, isolated, hiccupy giggles which developed into a continuous outpouring. I tried to stop them in vain. "You two had better leave," I said.

They scrambled hastily through the door and I felt abandoned somehow. They seemed to enjoy what I endured as an aching disruption of our lives. Actually it is fortunate they can adjust so well, and I should be grateful.

Danny went out and only Ellen still sat on the bench to my left, a sullen look on her face, hands between her knees.

"Something wrong, Ellen?"

"I'm not going to like it here."

I searched for words to cheer her but found none. They had disappeared into the pit of my depression.

Carefully I said, "We have to make the best of it; there's nothing else we can do."

"But it's Christmas and we don't even have a tree."

"No." The tree had been so beautiful last Christmas with its candles flaming peacefully, none trying to burn anything except its own wax (although the stick with the wet sponge was ready).

Then the story. *For unto you is born this day* .... This day. The clouds had thickened; we were going to get rain. Suddenly I was in a hurry, for I had forgotten our things still lying on the grass. "Come Ellen," I said as I got up. "We have to bring our things inside. Perhaps you should find Yvonne and Jony. They have to help."

We tried to get a mattress through the door but the aisle was obstructed by Miss Boon, surrounded by a group of women. Hester held a measuring tape in her lifted hand. We set the mattress against the door and listened.

"I just measured the length of the barracks and divided this by the number of people. We'll each have one metre of space."

For there was no room in the inn. But *they* had only one child, a baby, and I have four, which is an advantage, for we get five metres of length by one-half of the width, minus half the width of the aisle, totalling about four metres. That should be ample room to arrange the bunks and our own beds so that there will be space to move around.

Miss Boon had begun to measure at the front. One metre per person. We had to move slightly over from our first chosen spot, and as I arranged our new home, my energy revived. The girls brought in the other mattress and cots and the low cupboard we had brought, which I put against the wall beside the one narrow window that came within our range.

Miss Boon was working on the other side of the aisle while we were busy. I noticed how red her face was. It could be her usual colour — she went about her business in an agitated way, as if the work of a lifetime had to be done in one day. I was glad at least one person was totally dedicated and enviably industrious, although her energy seemed to me the simulated vigour of a nervous hen trying to get off the ground in flight.

Finally the beds stood arranged in U form, one cot lengthways along the aisle and the bunks and other cot perpendicular to it. Yvonne and Jony had to sleep together in one bed, which was better than a manger. I thought of Greta and did not envy her. It could become very difficult with a baby.

While we were creating some order out of yesterday's indescribable chaos, the rain had been kind enough to wait till everything was inside. Then it came, a ponderous, windless rain, coursing straight down in thick beams. Our window looked out over a stretch of concrete at one edge of which stood five short poles with water taps attached. Along the other edge was the ditch.

For a while I made a study of the people with whom we had been thrown together, and I discovered a conglomeration of different nationalities. There was an American woman whose husband had worked for the BPM oil company. She had no children with her, only a grown son in a man's camp.

I visited Greta and we talked for a while, quietly so as not to wake the baby.

"Do you know there's an English woman across from us?" she asked.

"English?"

"Yes, she worked in one of our hospitals for the Red Cross."

"A family?"

"Yes, two boys. They're playing with Bob and Tim."

"I think I've been too involved with our own little group in Tenang because I never realized there are so many English, and even Americans."

"Don't forget the French woman — and the German," Greta said, and laughed.

"Are you joking?" Of course I knew there were Germans. Their presence had been brought to our attention a few years ago in a rather unpleasant way, but I did not think of them as having anything to do with us now. Greta explained that they were refugees from Borneo, but was not sure for whom their husbands had worked. "I suppose we're all one pot of porridge now," she concluded. I nodded.

"I sure hope the war will be over soon."

"Probably. Our Allies are giving it all they have."

A clandestine radio had filtered in news which was encouraging but also frightening. Buna, on the Ono Bay past New Guinea, had been partly recovered by the Allies, but the *Kempeitai* was active against underground groups. There were arrests of S.A. leaders and the Japanese occupied Kawai and Kokinau on southwest coast of New Guinea. There were Allied air attacks on Koetaradja, Sumatra.

For behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people.

Lunch consisted of a watery soup and a chunk of coarse bread, after which I tried to make the children lie down, a difficult matter because Yvonne was dancing inside the square created by the beds. "This is our livingroom," she sang. "Our livingroom, our livingroom. This is ...."

"Yvonne, don't make so much noise. Mrs. Noordam or her children might be sleeping."

Yvonne plopped onto Danny's cot.

"I want you all to lie down and rest," I said.

"Why? I'm not tired at all."

"Me neither," Jony said.

Ellen came in too and climbed obediently up to the top bunk. "And this is *my* bedroom," she said, taking possession.

"It's not," Yvonne said, too loudly I thought.

"Shh!"

"It's not," she repeated, more softly but with no less force.

"Ellen can take the top," I said.

"For she's the oldest and can choose first," Yvonne mimicked, and I felt anger rise but was too tired to reprimand her.

"Right."

"Why should she always be first?" Yvonne wanted to know.

"Never mind. Just lie down. And you too, Jony. Both of you on the bottom bunk, and please be quiet."

I settled Danny on to his cot and then laid my own body down, exhausted and dispirited.

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities. And with his stripes we are healed. Disappointments a chronic pain; homesickness a leprous wound.

And it was still Christmas. I longed for a spicy *rysttafel*. The inadequate lunch had left me hungry. Oh, for some of the leftovers that always disappeared into our kitchen! What prodigal waste!

And this shall be a sign unto you. You shall find the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes.

I was born one stormy night in August of 1900 in a corner house in Rotterdam. I've preferred corner houses ever since. A house, not a stable; but the hut on the mission wasn't much more. Still, it had stood alone and independent, while here many families huddled together, each in their own tiny domain. A four by five meter space wasn't bad. If you were alone you had barely enough space to place your bed.

Our furniture from their safe crates had entered the small house with polite disdain, and we left our oak buffet and dining set in the crate with the Persian rug to avoid the tin cans of water. Our furniture, part of our life in Holland, remained strangers to me who had loved, polished and caressed them.

Hear my prayer, oh God, for I am a sojourner.

I folded my left arm across my forehead, and would not admit to myself that tears were very close.

For all the children there were some candies and a book under the tall tree which was brilliant with candles on our last carefree Christmas. That season ended like all other carefree Christmases, and soon after our peaceful existence was shattered, but we had celebrated in blissful disregard of the evil afoot.

Paul. Thoughts and images surged up, and I could no longer repress them. He read the Christmas story and concluded with a children's version.

Some women had suggested organizing a church service. "But who will preach a sermon?" Lena Noordam had asked.

Strange, a world without men. I wondered when I would get used to it, but a service would be nice.

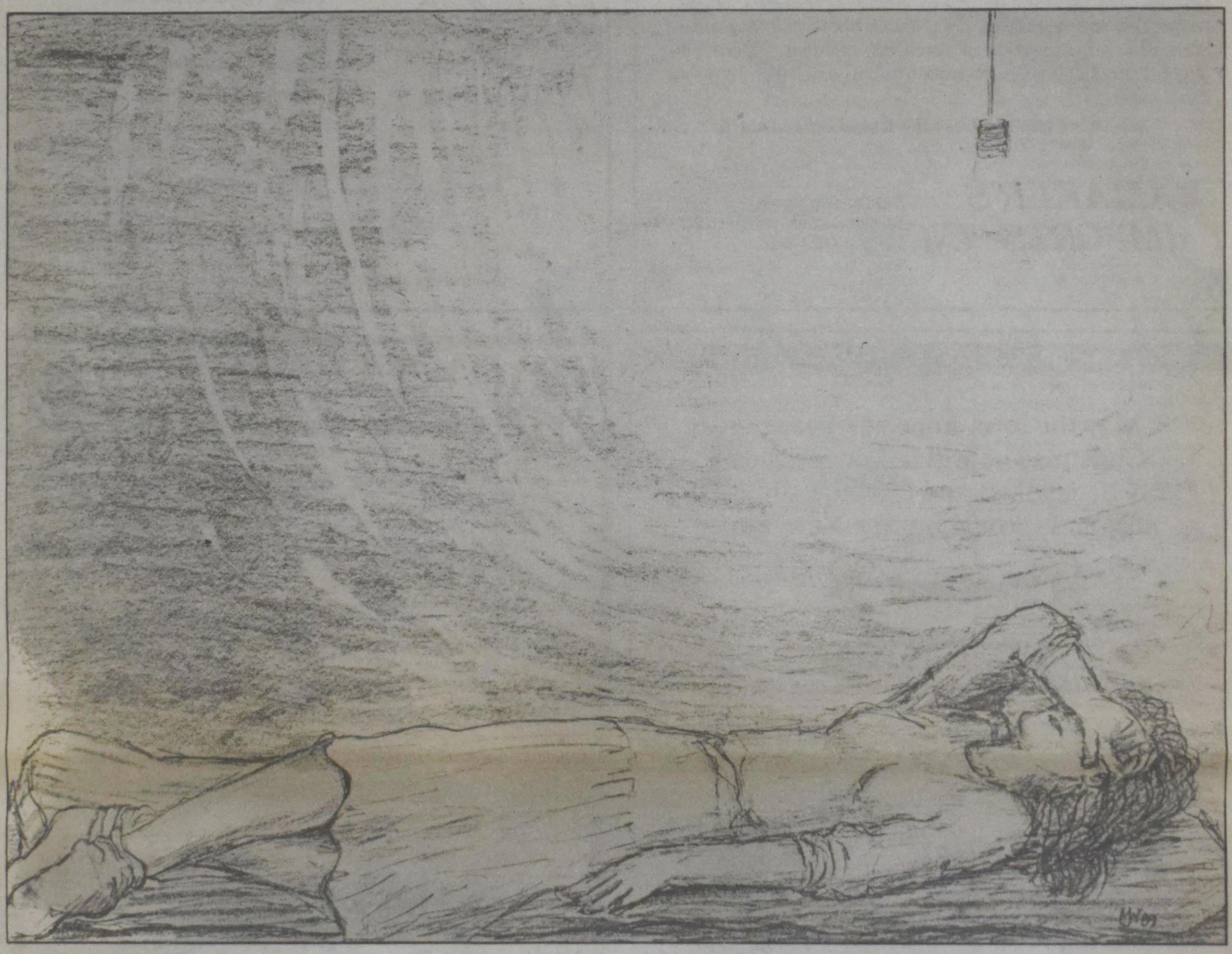
"One of us could read from the Bible," I said, and most agreed. Someone suggested, "And a story for the children."

"And songs."

"Yes."

At that point the efficient Miss Boon interrupted. "Ladies. I'm sorry to disappoint you, but the Japanese authorities do not allow us to meet in services, or any kind of gathering." I felt the disappointment like a stab in the face. The rain came down more heavily, insistently, inflating my depression, settling on me like a cloying cover. Our building disappeared into a world all its own behind a thick curtain of rain, a

The candle



blanket of grey, like clouds that would not lift. The children played in the puddles but I did not scold them. They were not quarrelling and seemed to enjoy themselves, except Ellen, who still seemed to suffer the same depression which enveloped me.

December 25 (7 p.m.)
Dear World,

The step from daylight to evening was scarcely noticeable. Supper had not been the *rysttafel* I had hoped for. That remained, like all good things, a memory. There was only more of the same watery soup and a cupful of rice, and milk for babies and teenagers. I had children in neither category, but was happy Greta had a little less to worry about.

At supper I discovered a young woman with a baby boy who had a definite Japanese slant to his eyes, which were black and inscrutable. I had heard of women who had consorted with the Japanese, willingly or unwillingly. *Behold, I bring you good tidings which shall be to all people.* All people. All.

There were some Indo women too, Indos who had claimed Dutch nationality. Indos, the rejected in-betweens. *He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.*

I had wailed long, sniffing sobs in that hut so very long ago, wiping my eyes with my patient handkerchief, with Paul longsuffering, trying to understand. Paul, who considered himself a soldier in the army of God which crossed mountains and seas with only one purpose: to bring love.

There was one lonely bulb dangling from the beams and I stared at it from my mattress. I fell asleep drawing the lonely bulb with me, a flame in my dream, my waking sleep.

A voice brought back consciousness, a special voice saying special words. *And on earth peace, good will toward men.*

How often had I heard the words, learned them, memorized them, repeated them. Had I ever really listened, absorbed their meaning? Had I understood?

Under the black-grey between the wooden beams it first appeared. *And suddenly there was with the angels....* A lurid glare, slowly changing to a soft light, moving, shifting, flushing the beams. The black receded, the grey disappeared.

A face appeared, enveloped in candlelight. A candle? A face? I recognized it. It was Greta's. Why was Greta walking around with a candle? In a white nightgown?

Other faces floated in the aisle above dark bodies, slowly converging. And the flame shone softly on, as a light had once shone, still did, and always would. Light, Life and Peace, the greatest ingredients in our existence, all born of love.

Children woke up and created a circle around the candle, some up in bunks, some on mattresses, some in the aisle. Candlelight reflected in their faces, in their shining eyes, to the bare rafters overhead and the narrow windows open to the night. *And there were shepherds abiding* in the hush of Christmas night.

The small flame flickered in the draft, timidly cowering.

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder.

The young woman who had consorted with the Japanese carried her baby boy, whose eyes gazed inscrutably, an infinity in them. She recited, *And she brought forth her firstborn son.*

The American with her two girls sang "Jesus bids us shine with a clear, pure light!" The German woman, who had a son in a man's camp, sang "Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht."

The French woman followed with unintelligible words, "Entre le boeuf et l'ane gris/Dort, dort, dort le Petit Fils," after which the English woman recited very softly, *Surely he has borne our grief and carried our sorrows.*

A light came into our midst, a focus. The light swayed, the flame reached up, quivered, almost went out, then pointed upward again. *And the glory of the Lord shone round about them.* The weak flame survived the onslaught of breathing voices. *Fear not, for unto you is born a child. For God so loved the world, that he gave....* God gave, and being God, he had so much to give.

Love? What was love? A giving? But giving what? What if you had nothing to give and were destitute? *And his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.*

Prince of Peace.

Yes, that is it. Prince of Peace. No matter what happens.

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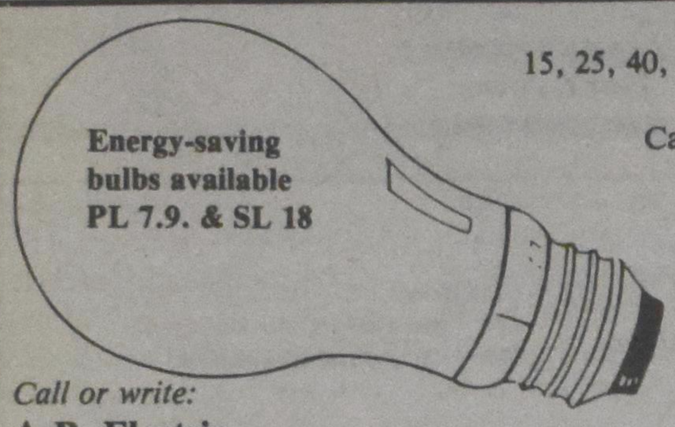

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About this year's Christmas issue

Bert Witvoet

We have decided to repeat last year's practice of sending free copies of our Christmas issue to over 200 Christian Reformed churches in Canada and to all the missionary families of the Christian Reformed Church of North America. In keeping with the thrust of my editorial "Christmas is for strangers," we are bringing Bethlehem to these brothers and sisters who have voluntarily become displaced for the sake of Christ. We salute them.

The illustrators for this year's issue are Bas De Groot (front cover), a Wainfleet, Ont., artist, Joyce Geleynse ("Light over the College Chapel" and "Send me an Angel") from Winchester, Ont., and Marguerite Witvoet ("A Candle"), music performance student at Brock University, St. Catharines, Ont.

We chose the breaking down of the Berlin Wall as the theme for the front cover. If Christ (the stone in Nebuchadnezzar's dream) crushed the empires represented by the image of gold, silver, bronze, iron and clay (see Wayne Brouwer's "The Fifth Reich"), then one must also credit the Kingdom of God with the collapse of the Communist system. Why did Communism fail? Because it went against the Word of God laid down in Scripture *and* the creation.

The illustration does not suggest that the outcome of the breaking down of the wall will be the ushering in of the capitalistic kingdom of heaven. The fall of the other empires did not necessarily lead to greater obedience and the spread of justice and mercy. But the stone keeps on rolling and filling the earth, until such a time as the meek, along with the meek child of Bethlehem, will inherit the earth.

We hope that all of you will enjoy the fruit of our efforts. Spread the good news of this issue to other strangers. Pray for those in prison and for those who are refugees. Send them an angel!

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Mary VanderVennen, *Therapist, Christian Counselling Services*
Diane Marshall, *Therapist, Institute of Family Living*
James Olthuis, Ph.D., *Professor, Institute for Christian Studies*

Beginning with the conviction that the empowerment of self in community is the purpose of psychotherapy, this seminar intends to deal with a variety of issues that emerge in the practice of counselling. The aim of the course will be to create a forum, in which, from a biblical perspective, to explore theories, share experiences and develop strategies to enhance our ability to engage in the ministry of encouragement and healing.

TUESDAYS, 7 TO 10 P.M., JANUARY 16 THROUGH APRIL 17, 1990

SPIRITUALITY AND THE RENEWAL OF THE CHURCH

George Vandervelde, Ph.D., *Professor of Systematic Theology*

The aim of this course is to explore the communal dimensions of spirituality. Questions to be examined include the relationships of charismatic renewal to church renewal, charismatic gifts to professional leadership in the church, the role of women and men in ordained ministry, the task of the church in the face of the needs within and outside immediate community, and the unity and brokenness of the church at the local level.

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How St. Nicholas became Santa Claus

Ugo Premate

"It was the night before Christmas and all through the house ...."

So begins one of the most famous poems in the English language, one that has influenced North American tradition greatly. For it is because of Dr. Clement Clarke Moore's *The Visit of St. Nicholas* that we enjoy our concept of Santa today.

This picture of a jolly and plump fellow is a far cry from the stately St. Nicholas of Europe, where the tradition of a holiday giving actually began.

Little is known about St. Nicholas other than that he was born in Asia Minor and eventually became a much loved archbishop of Myra, where he died around the year 324.

After his death, numerous legends sprang up about his charitable deeds, especially in regard to children. He became the patron saint of boys and girls, and his feast day, Dec. 6, became the occasion for giving children small gifts of toys or gingerbread.

The association of St. Nicholas with gift giving probably came about through a legend that credited him with bestowing money upon a penniless nobleman who had three daughters to marry off, but no dowries with which to do so.

Christianized customs

The Church, seeking a way to Christianize pagan customs, turned to St. Nicholas for assistance, for the giving of presents during the winter months is an ancient tradition. The Romans exchanged gifts during their Saturnalia festival in December, and the people of northern Europe had the god Woden, who brought gifts to them in the middle of winter, as well as Berchta, the hearth goddess, who paid visits to homes in December.

Accordingly, a new ritual came into being: on the eve of his feast day, St. Nicholas was supposed to ride across the sky on a white or pale grey horse, just as Woden and Berchta had done.

For the good child, the saint brought gifts; for the naughty youngster, there were rods and switches. Retaining aspects of Berchta, St. Nicholas was still associated with the hearth in various ways. Either the children's shoes or stockings would be placed there, or hay or grain would be left there for his horse. And, he was accompanied by a decidedly pagan-like creature. Sometimes this small, ugly elf or dwarf was given the task of sliding down the chimney, a feat too undignified for the good saint.

With the Reformation, St. Nicholas began to be supplanted by the Christ Child as a gift giver in Protestant Europe. And, with the demise of St. Nicholas' Day, gifts began to arrive on Christmas Eve.

Theme and variations

There were many other substitutions for St. Nicholas, such as Pere Noel in France and Knecht Ruprecht in Bavaria and Austria.

In Holland however, St. Nicholas still retained his popularity, for which our modern day Santa can be thankful. For it was the Dutch who brought St. Nicholas to the New World in 1624. They called him Sinterklaas.

In 1809, Washington Irving wrote of the saint's annual ride over the tree tops in a wagon filled with gifts.

We can only surmise that Dr. Moore had read Irving's popular history containing the account of St. Nicholas. For instead of describing the saint as tall and stately, he echoed Irving's description of him as a sturdy Dutchman who smoked a pipe. Dr. Moon was also probably inspired by an illustration published in 1822 showing St. Nicholas in a sleigh pulled by one reindeer.

Dr. Moore's poem was published in 1823 and many years later Thomas Nast, the well known illustrator, gave us his version of St. Nicholas, based on Moore's poem. However, he called the jolly gent Santa Claus.

Reprinted with permission from the Catholic Register, *Dec. 5-11, 1987.*

Peter and Marja are IN

Dear P and M:

Soon it will be Christmas again and time for our annual struggle about giving presents.

You see, we immigrated to Canada about 10 years ago and still appreciate the Dutch practice of giving gifts on December 5. To us, the Canadian custom of opening presents on Christmas morning seems to get in the way of the real message of Christmas. Our kids, on the other hand, tell us that they feel out of it when we do it on the 5th.

The length of our shopping list is a real problem for us, too. We can hardly afford to buy presents for everyone. Sometimes we feel like skipping the whole business!

Can you make some suggestions? We don't like feeling this way when it should be a very joyful time for us as Christians.

Dear Annual Struggle:

When well-intentioned traditions become burdens you need to know that you can stop and reconsider how you've been doing things.

Since Christmas has become an annual struggle for you, sit down with your family this week and make some changes. This season should be a time of celebration, not obligation.

Apparently, there are two areas of conflict in your family. The first has to do with "when" you will open your gifts. In your Dutch tradition you gave small gifts on Dec. 5. Many Dutch-Canadian families now exchange gifts a day or two before Dec. 25 or on Christmas Eve so that they can "come and worship Christ the King" on Christmas morning without distraction. This compromise puts our families on schedule with the rest of our culture while still keeping separate the pleasure of exchanging gifts and the joy of receiving the greatest gift of all.

Your question about responsible giving suggests that you also struggle with the "how" of exchanging gifts. You need to decide together who will buy for whom and what the spending limit will be.

Some of our friends have a shopping list that includes everyone in their extended family. Frankly, it drives them crazy, but they don't know how to get out of this expensive and time-consuming family expectation.

It should not be necessary to have to shop for anyone beyond your immediate family, with the possible exception of your parents. If you do plan a large family get-together during the Christmas season, have everyone draw a name and set a spending limit that takes the lowest income into account.

You can also skip a gift exchange all together and ask everyone to bring baked goods, carol sheets and various games instead. Expect a few protests, but don't be surprised when most people thank you for sparing their energy and budgets.

Responsible giving will keep everyone's budget in mind. It will also extend beyond the family to other concerns. It is still more blessed to give than to receive and your family discussion could also focus on a cause or a need that would be helped by your gift. Our children should also be able to see that we value giving more than receiving.

Above all, God loves a cheerful giver. He is not praised and our families and friends are not blessed by an exercise in panicked shopping that is meant to cover all the bases. Anything that turns the anticipation of Christmas to dread needs to be reviewed and reformed.

We wish you a restful season and a blessed Christmas that prepares you for the coming of the Prince of Peace!

Dear P and M:

My sister attends a church where the worship services have a lot of extras like a musical group, testimonies, banners and quite a bit of handclapping. My parents are not too crazy about her going there instead of to our own church where the services are more traditional. My Dad says that the church she goes to has too much entertainment and that the preaching is no longer central. He says that "worship" means focusing on a holy God, not on people. I find myself caught in the middle. I like happy services and participation, but at the same time I miss something of the majesty of God in my sister's church. Who is right?

Dear Caught in the Middle:

Who is right? Both are! And both need to appreciate each other's unique ways of bringing praise to God.

Your father would sing a different tune if he were to meet some heart-broken parents whose sons and daughters have turned their backs on the Lord*. He should be thankful that your sister worships regularly.

Has he attended these services? If not, urge him to accompany his daughter so that he knows what he's talking about first hand. When he goes, let it be with a worshipful heart, not a judgmental attitude.

The style of these services may not be for him, but he has to give his daughter the space to meet the Lord in a way that is meaningful for her.

Of course, the same goes for her.

As for you, don't be drawn into an either-or argument about which church does it better. Just be thankful that your Dad and your sister actively express their love for the Lord in worship, albeit in different liturgical settings.

*See Adrian Peetoom's three-part article "Not All My Children Go to Church Anymore" (C.C. Oct. 20, 27, Nov. 3).

Peter and Marja Slofstra are a pastor and wife team living in St. Catharines, Ont. They are assisted by an advisory panel consisting of: Sam Da Silva, Ineke Brouwer-Parlevliet, Tom Zeyl, Willy Suk-Kleer, Bert Witvoet.

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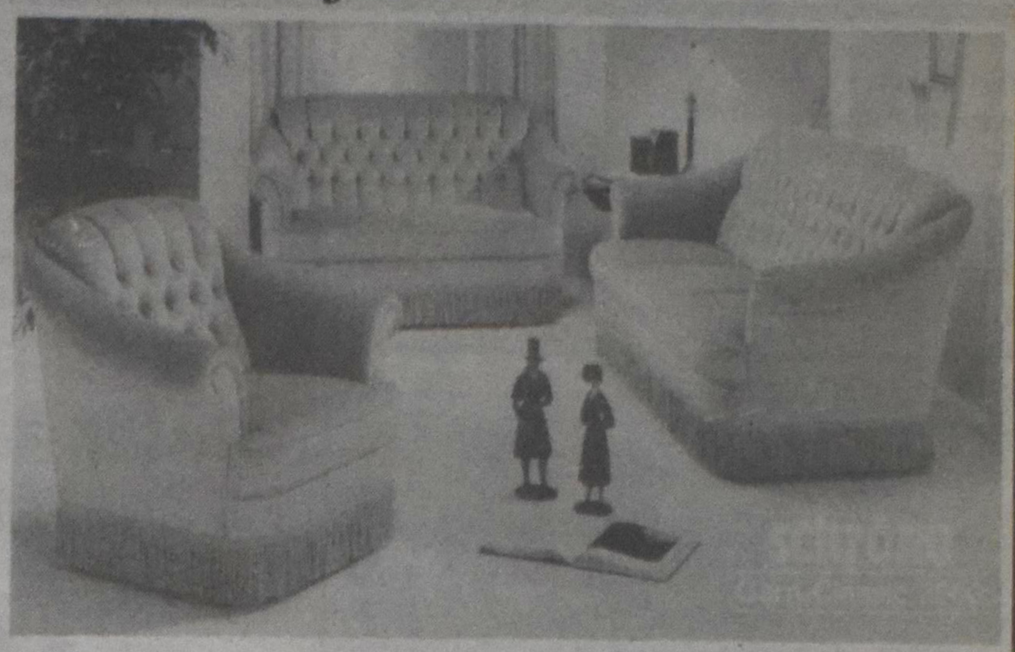

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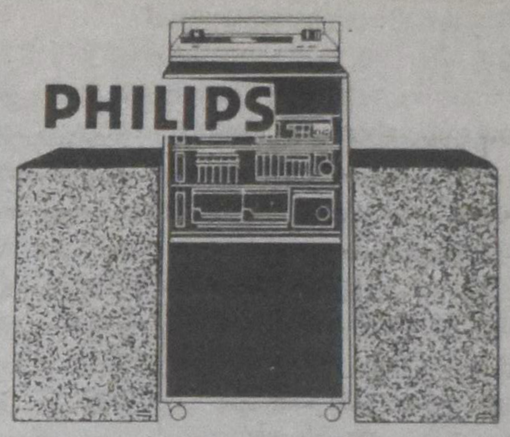

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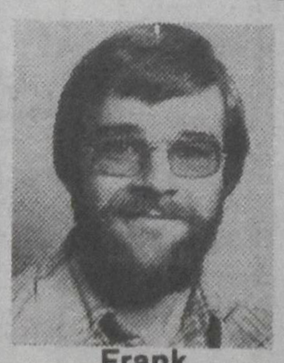
Gary Van Dyk



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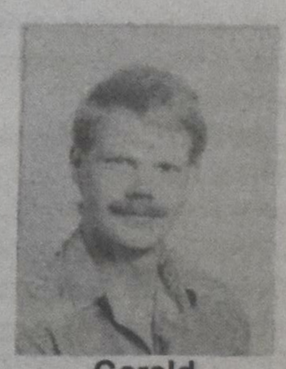

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Christmas spirit lost and found

David Martens

I sat on a bench and watched as the final countdown began. It was down to the last eight hours of shopping before Christmas. Shoppers rushed by with their packages in hand and a determined look in their eye that told you to stand clear. Some ran by so fast they didn't take note of those they jostled and bumped.

I rarely heard an "I'm sorry" or "Please excuse me." The feeling of first come, first served filled the air like a thick dark rain cloud ready to strike with a bolt of lightning anyone who violated the code. There were also those who were so worn out that they had to drag themselves into "just one more store" to find the perfect gift.

Many years ago Charles Dickens' Scrooge said, "Christmas, Bah-humbug." As I watched the senseless agony that these shoppers place on themselves at this time of year, I started to understand his point of view.

As the crowd battled for position at the bargain tables, I did not see "Peace on earth." When they pushed and shoved their way into line, there was no "Good will toward men." And the only "Glad tidings" that they knew were when their shopping partner was able to get the item before they were all sold out.

I was ready to leave this hopeless place, when in the distance a small figure caught my eye. It was not hustling about like the others I had seen. Instead it seemed to wander aimlessly back and forth in the aisle. As it approached I heard a hopeless, frightened cry coming from the child. Tears filled his eyes and spilled down his cheeks but no one seemed to notice him, and those who did chose to ignore him.

Suddenly, out of this sea of cold humanity a worried man burst through and ran to the child with open arms. The father held him close. The boy's fears were eliminated by the mere presence of his father. The sparkle of life and hope returned to that child's eye as he walked away hand in hand with his father.

For the first time all day in this "Christmas Season" I saw what Christmas was really meant to be.

David Martens works for a lumber company in St. Catharines, Ont. He, his wife and two children live in Vineland.

Let's talk shopping

Dean McRae

Christmas shopping. In a few weeks the Christmas tradition will begin once again. We will dedicate several evenings in December to looking for gifts for people who don't need anything. "But it's Christmas," we say, "Everyone goes a little overboard at this time." We easily convince ourselves that a little overspending is no big deal.

Unfortunately, however, a little overspending often ends up being too much of a financial strain for many families. They can't afford to spend $200 or $300 or more at Christmas, but they do. They feel they have to. Many families go into debt or feel guilty that they're spending money on presents when that money is desperately needed for something else.

One mother described it as feeling trapped. Her kids, she said, really believed that they weren't loved as much if they didn't receive as many presents from their parents as did other kids. Many parents dread the nagging days before Christmas when their kids spell out exactly what their big expectations are for Christmas.

Parents often feel frustrated and alone in their efforts to limit gift giving. No one wants to step out for fear of dampening the Christmas spirit or being labelled a party pooper.

Expanding inventory

Unfortunately, poor gift-giving habits often get worse. The expectations gradually get more expensive. "You really can't buy a decent gift for under $30 these days," say some. The gifts also get more numerous. When you were growing up, you often bought only for your own family plus one or two others; but by age 30, the number of gifts you have to buy easily double to include in-laws and nieces and nephews. Indeed, Christmas for many, can be an expensive and stressful time.

Fortunately, however, when you talk to people about Christmas gift giving, some steps can be found to limit Christmas spending. People can draw names rather than buy for everyone in the family. Families can agree on a spending limit for gifts. Some families encourage the giving of homemade gifts only. Giving carefully chosen second-hand gifts is another option. Some people do their Christmas shopping at garage sales. This is a good idea especially for children three and under who care little whether their clothes or toys are new.

Offer services

A great gift idea for many young couples is an offer for a free night or weekend of babysitting. Lending a VCR to someone for a couple of weeks is another idea. Sponsoring a Third World child through World Vision or some other similar organization is yet another alternative.

Perhaps I should make it clear that I'm not advocating that a "Spartan" Christmas is the best. I'm not saying we should only give small, practical gifts like socks and underwear and maybe a chocolate letter. Relatively expensive gifts are sometimes appropriate. But some kind of balance is desperately needed. I'm sure that if the average family added up all the money spent at Christmas it would come to the conclusion that there must be a better way. We should share our ideas on Christmas giving and encourage one another to be more responsible.

Let's not "shop 'til we drop" this Christmas. Let's be more sensible in our gift giving. Let's practise restraint and learn when to "stop the shopping."

Dean McRae is a member of Zion Christian Reformed Church in Oshawa, Ont.

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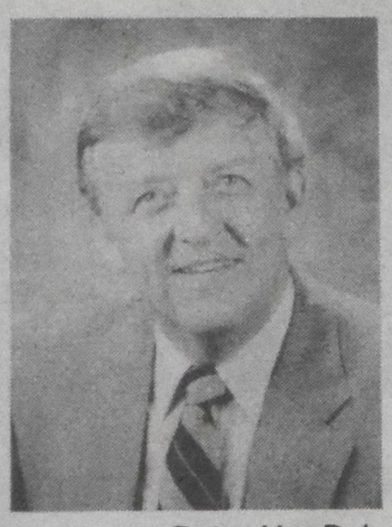
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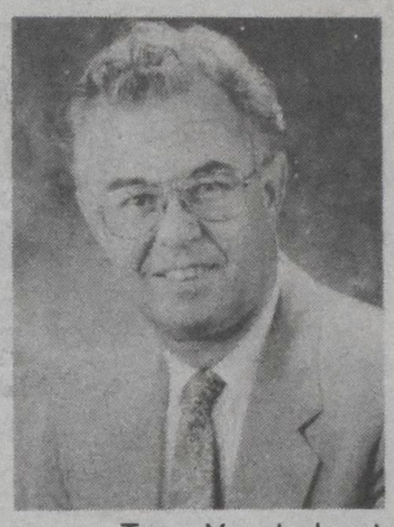
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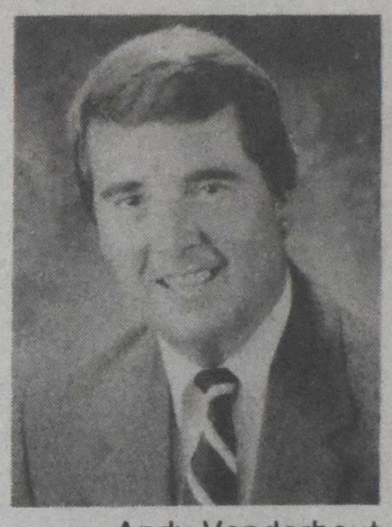
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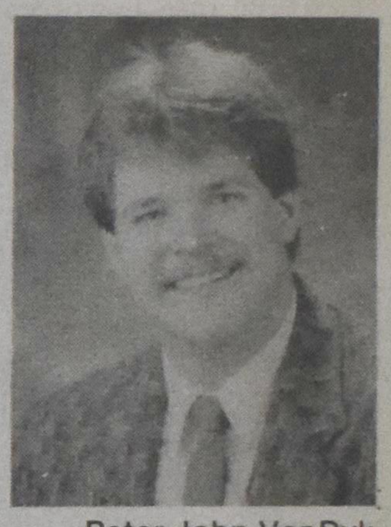
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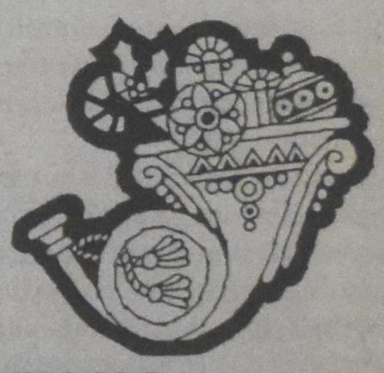

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The Christmas tree is a *tannenbaum*

Marcus Van Steen

(CANADIAN SCENE) — In view of the antiquity of Christmas — a mid-winter festival has been held in most parts of the world for at least 12,000 years — it is amazing that many of our Christmas traditions are not so very old. For example, the custom of a decorated tree is comparatively young in most parts of the Christian world.

The Christmas tree, with its sparkling lights and appropriate decorations, made its first appearance in Germany. It's generally accepted that Martin Luther started it. While walking home one cold December evening in 1536, Luther was impressed by the beauty of the stars glistening through the green foliage of the tall fir trees. The peace and beauty of the scene inspired him and he thought there could be no more appropriate symbol to mark the birth of Jesus. So he cut a fir tree and set it up in his home for Christmas, decorated with glittering candles. Later, ornaments in the shape of Christian symbols were added.

The Christmas tree remained a German custom until 1848 when Albert, the German prince who married Queen Victoria, had one set up in Windsor Castle. Shortly before that, German immigrants to the United States had introduced the Christmas tree to Pennsylvania. But these were not the first Christmas trees to be seen in North America.

In 1781 a lavishly decorated and illuminated Christmas tree delighted and astounded the guests at a military party in Sorel, Quebec. The banquet was at the headquarters of Baron von Riedesel, commander of the Hessian troops who had been sent to Canada at the outbreak of the American Revolutionary War. These soldiers were recruited throughout the German states on behalf of King George III, whose kingdoms included Hanover, and they played their part in repelling a rebel American army which had invaded Canada.

With the signing of a peace treaty, the Hessian regiments were disbanded, and many of the soldiers chose to remain in Canada, settling in the Maritimes and Lower and Upper Canada where, among other things, they spread the custom of the Christmas tree.

Have a safe Christmas tree!

TORONTO (MCCR) — Finding a fresh Christmas tree may be a prickly pursuit, but it's worth a few scratches, if only for safety's sake, experts say.

Dried out trees are not only unattractive and messy, they are real fire hazards, says Greg Alexander, a prominent Ontario fire department captain and former provincial government safety advisor.

The Ontario Consumer Ministry is urging everyone planning to buy a real tree this Christmas to shop around as much as necessary to find a fresh one.

"Even if it's not the cheapest or most shapely one around, a good water-laden tree is by far the best deal," says the ministry.

According to Bill Irwin of the Christmas Tree Growers Association of Ontario, there are two ways to check for freshness.

"First bend a needle between your thumb and forefinger," Irwin says. "It should flex, but not snap. The second method is to bang the tree on the ground. If the outside needles fall out in abundance, it isn't fresh."

Some trees shed their inner needles naturally, so don't worry if they fall from inside, he adds.

Both Irwin and Alexander agree it is vital to cut at least half an inch off the bottom of any tree before bringing it indoors.

Harvesting of Christmas trees begins in November in Ontario. Once cut, the trunks naturally seal over with sap. While this keeps moisture in, it also shuts it out. Unless recut, the trees cannot draw in water and will quickly dry out indoors.

Always stand natural trees in a plentiful supply of water. Irwin says the common addition of sugar to the water is of no benefit.

"The main thing is to keep the water topped up," he says. "Keep the sugar for your coffee."

The association spokespersons also suggests trees be kept indoors for no more than two weeks.

The most popular types of trees are the long-needled Scotch pine and the white spruce which has shorter needles. The latter variety is usually the most expensive of the two, as it takes about four years longer to grow a good-sized specimen. Most five-foot tall white spruces are about 12 years old, Irwin says.

Less common varieties such as balsam, white pine, fir and red pine account for approximately five per cent of the harvest.

Information about natural Christmas trees should be available from local growers and retailers.

For specific advice on safety issues, area fire prevention officers are a good resource, Alexander says.

In general, he advises keeping any tree — natural or artificial — away from heat sources and exits.

Traveling by the light of the bright Morning Star

Tini Van Ameyde

I am the Root and Offspring of David, the bright Morning Star.

Many words have been spoken and written about the true meaning of Christmas, words that at times have been a great comfort to believers. One of the clearest, most beautiful of these verbal images is the concise picture our risen Lord gave to St. John on the island of Patmos; he showed us for all time the true meaning of Christmas.

Ever since, the Church has known that the story of Bethlehem really began in the Garden of Eden and will end on the Last Day. That story is in full swing even as you read this paper.

We all know (but don't always act like we know) the meaning of Christmas. And we all have memories of Christmases that are both sad and joyful. I would like to be able to write that we who have every reason to be merry will celebrate Christmas with joyful, grateful hearts. But it's not so. In these prosperous days we seem to have more trouble finding the King in the stable than ever before.

Oh yes, our tastefully decorated churches will be full and we may attend sublime concerts and cheery parties. But we all know we can go to 10 Christmas parties and still miss out on the real one. Just where are *you*, where am *I*, on the road to Bethlehem? That's what counts.

During the decade almost past, both confusion and apathy have blanketed the church. The faith of young and old alike has been shaken. And some of us have been so busy doing our own thing that we have become thoroughly self-centred. We no longer ask, "Lord, what do *you* want me to do?" We seem to have lost sight of one of Christ's most important teachings: that only those who personally respond to God and maintain a committed relationship to him are able to give spiritual guidance to others.

Children of light

The point I would like to emphasize is that Christmas is a year-round feast. No matter how much money and time we spend on our celebrations with family or friends, we will share the peace and joy of Christmas only if the newborn King is the king of our lives every day of the year.

The finest Christmas gift we can give our loved ones is the example of our faithfulness to our Lord and his teachings. It was he who told us to live in compassion and purity, as shining candles in the darkness.

Even during the dark night of the Roman occupation there were Israelites who were shining lights, who had not conformed to the world, who had not given up hope that the Holy One of Israel would fulfil his messianic promise. And when that Messiah finally appeared, in a way no Jew had expected, they were ready to welcome him who was "a light for revelation to the Gentiles" — that is, a light for you and me.

The words our risen Lord spoke which we find on the last page of our Bibles were apparently the last ones he spoke on earth. They immediately bring to mind the messianic prophecies of Isaiah 9 and 11. Jesus calls himself "the Root and Offspring of David." He wants to make clear that he was not only the Son of David, as his followers had so often called him, but the very *root* of David's royal house, the King who was before David, having come from eternity.

My dictionary defines *morning star* as "a planet, especially Venus, rising in the east *shortly before the sun.*"

"I am the bright Morning Star." Can you think of a more beautiful way for Jesus to describe himself and what he wants to be for his Church until the end of time?

The spectacular Morning Star was born in poverty for our sakes. He was humiliated and tortured for our sakes. No human being will ever comprehend how much his faithfulness cost him, or how much *God* suffered when he permitted his beloved to be sacrificed — the innocent for the guilty.

But we know that his faithfulness opened the way to the Father's heart. It made us sons and daughters of God, singing people with a royal residence to which to come home.

When we celebrate Christmas 1989 amidst the destruction, confusion and greed on this planet, we may shake our heads and sadly wonder what will become of us and Earth. But if we look up, we will see the Morning Star, shining brightly in a night that is already touched by the pink of day break. And we will know that the great Day is at hand when *everything* will be made new.

This is God's promise and he surely will keep it. This is also the meaning of Christmas.

May the light of the Morning Star fill our hearts with hope on Christmas Day and be our guide in the coming year!

Tini Van Ameyde is a former columnist for Calvinist Contact. *She lives in Edmonton.*

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L2M 3W4

(416) 934-7811 George Enns

Lakewood Christian Campgrounds
R.R. 5, Forest, ON N0N 1J0

To all our friends:
May you experience peace and joy this Christmas and may God direct your footsteps throughout 1990
Staff and directors

Our warm wishes for a blessed Christmas and a happy New Year
Gerry and Paulina Denbok
Mrs. Ina Klaassens
Sue & Rhonda

THE Family Christian Bookstore Burlington
750 Guelph Line (1 km south of the Q.E.W.) Burlington L7R 3N5 PHONE (416) 637-9151

Christmas Greeting

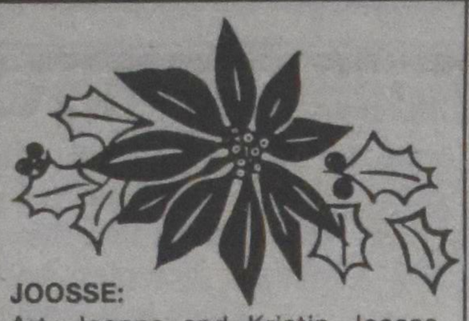
BONEKAMP:
Janny en Gerard Bonekamp wensen alle vrienden, kennissen en andere bekenden een Gezellig Kerstfeest en een Voorspoedig 1990.
Uitgevers "De Hollandse Krant"
P.O. Box 3131, Langley, BC V3A 4R5
Tel. 530-9446, Fax 530-9766

DE JONG:
To our far-away children and grandchildren, relatives and friends, a blessed Christmas and a peace-filled New Year.
Stan and Corrie de Jong, 2 Sullivan Dr., St. Catharines, ON L2N 1K2.

DE RYK:
Wishing all my relatives and friends a blessed Christmas and a very happy new year. May God bless you all.
Mrs. An de Ryk, 134 Sanders St. E., Apt. 215, Exeter, ON N0N 1S1.

HOUTMAN:
The Houtman family, Harry, Tine, Heather, Ruth and Neil, send special Christmas greetings to you.
A special thanks from Harry for hospitality so warmly extended throughout the year.

Christmas Greeting



JOOSSE:
Art, Joanne and Kristin Joosse would like to extend the greetings of the season to all of their family and friends. May the joy of the birth of the Saviour live in your hearts and lives every day of your ministry to Him."
1009 Courtland Dr., Ancaster, ON L9G 3L1.

VAN DYKE:
To our family and friends we want to wish a blessed Christmas and a prosperous New Year.
Tony & Alice Van Dyke, #4-659 Barber Ave. N., Listowel, ON N4W 1S4.

VEENSTRA:
Mr. and Mrs. Pieter en Florence Veenstra of 2 White St., Apt. 105, St. Catharines, ON L2N 1Z2, wensen familie, vrienden en bekenden, Gods onmisbare zegen voor het jaar 1990.

Births

VANDERSPEK and HAANSTRA:
Children are ... "a bit of eternity from the Father up above."
Mr. and Mrs. D. Buursma of Hamilton, Ont., thank and praise God for the safe arrival of three granddaughters on November 3, 1989.
Vanderspek, Neil and Janet, gave birth to

ALICIA HELENA

weighing 9 lbs. 6 oz. A welcomed sister for Kevin, Marlene and Derek. Fourteenth grandchild for Mr. and Mrs. C. VanderSpek of Embro, Ont., and 10th grandchild for us.
Home address: N. VanderSpek, R.R.#2, Tavistock, ON N0B 2R0.
Haanstra, Jerry and Jane, gave birth to twin daughters

JANELLE HILDA
weighing 5 lbs. 2½ oz.
and
JANICE DAWN
weighing 5 lbs. 4½ oz.

Welcomed sisters for Jennifer, Jason and Janine; 34th and 35th grandchildren for Mr. and Mrs. H. Haanstra of York, Ont., and 11th and 12th grandchildren for us.
Home address: J. Haanstra, R.R.#1, Vinemount, ON L0R 2G0.
"Praise God from whom all blessings flow."

Anniversaries

1944 December 14 1989
We thank the Lord that we may celebrate our parents' and grandparents' 45th wedding anniversary

JOHN and HENNIE WINTERS
(nee Vandebelt)

We pray that the Lord may continue to bless you in the years to come. With thankfulness and love from your children and grandchildren:
Stan & Thea Winters — Strathroy, Ont.
Ellen, Jeffery, Anita, Tara
Frank & Alice Winters — Calgary, Alta.
David, Sonja
Femmy & Ron George — Ailsa Craig, Ont.
Susan, Mark
Rosalie & Lawerance Hellinga — Toronto, Ont.
Tilly & Terry Berg — Toronto, Ont.
Cindy Winters — London, Ont.
Open house will be held on Saturday, Dec. 9, 1989, at East Chr. Ref. Church, Strathroy, from 2-4 p.m. Best wishes only.

Obituaries

Sneek Belleville
1900 1989
We remember a faithful mother

ALYDA WILHELMINA
COUPERUS-KOOPMANS

who passed away on Nov. 11, 1989.
Predeceased by her husband Gerhardus Couperus.
Tony & Alyda Barkema
Egbert & Jane Couperus
Dirk & Grace Couperus
George & Grace Couperus
Piet & Fina Couperus
Jack Couperus
Text: 1 Corinthians 2:6-16
Correspondence address: Mrs. A. Barkema, R.R.#5, Belleville, Ont.

Kollum, Fr. Hamilton, Ont.
The Netherlands Canada
Feb. 6, 1912 Nov. 10, 1989
"The Lord is my light and my salvation — whom shall I fear?" (Ps. 27:1a)
On Nov. 10, 1989, the Lord called home to himself our dearly loved wife, mother, grandmother and great-grandmother

WIETSKE (WILMA) DEGROOT
(nee Lulofs)

Though we grieve her loss, we rejoice in the knowledge that she is with her Saviour.
Sieger DeGroot, husband;
and children:
Alice & Richard Veenstra
Henk & Ann DeGroot
Clarence & Tina DeGroot
Andy & Susan DeGroot
Gary & Henny DeGroot
Ann & Keith Koens
and 16 grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.
The funeral service was held at Mount Hamilton Chr. Ref. Church, Hamilton, Ont., on Nov. 14, 1989. Rev. R.J. Sikkema officiated.
Correspondence address: 676 Rymal Rd. E., Hamilton, ON L8W 1B3.

On Nov. 10, 1989, God took from us our beloved member

FRANCIS (Froukje) REITSMA

born September 1910 in Winsum (Friesland), the Netherlands.
The funeral was held Nov. 14, 1989, at the Chr. Ref. Church of Taber, Alta., with Pastor Harry Zantingh officiating. The Friendship Circle in Taber will really miss her and herewith send sincere condolences to her children and family. May God give the children comfort and strength as they miss their parental home.
The Friendship Circle, Taber Chr. Ref. Church, Alta.

Obituaries

De Heere heeft tot Zich genomen onze lieve Mem en Oma

SIPKJE DE VRIES

sinds 8 juli 1973 weduwe van F.E. Nijdam
28-1-1902 te Dronrijp 25-10-1989
Psalm 43:4
Dan ga ik op tot Gods altaren,
Tot God, mijn God, de bron van vreugd;
Dan zal ik, juichend, stem en snaren
Ten roem van Zijne goedheid paren,
Die, na kortstondig ongeneugt',
Mij eindeloos verheugt.
Gerben Nijdam & Coba Nijdam-Leegwater — Chatham, Ont.
Cor Nijdam — Diemen, the Neth.
Rigtje Kramer-Nijdam & Henk Kramer — Dresden, Ont.
Otto Nijdam & Ans Nijdam-Luyt — Drachten, the Neth.
Ido Nijdam & Francis Nijdam-Hoekstra — Chatham, Ont.
Heerke Nijdam & Lida Nijdam-v.d. Mije — Vijfhuizen, the Neth.
Lies Nijdam & Wil Lowie — Rotterdam, the Neth.
Annie Knibbe-Nijdam & David Knibbe — Weteringbrug, the Neth.
Ida Di Vincenzo-Nijdam & Paul De Vincenzo — Hamilton, Ont.
Frits Nijdam — Amsterdam, the Neth.
Renny Ernsting-Nijdam & Dick Ernsting — Z.O. Beemster, the Neth.
Koos Kramer — Schermerhorn, the Neth.
39 grandchildren and 43 great-grandchildren.
Schermerhorn, the Neth., Oct. 25, 1989.
The funeral took place on Oct. 30, 1989.
Correspondence address: G. Nijdam, R.R.#3, Chatham, ON N7M 5J3.

"For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living." (Rom. 14:7-9)
On Nov. 10, 1989, the Lord her Shepherd suddenly called home

WILHELMINA HAMERSMA

at the age of 67.
Beloved wife of the late Simon Hamersma (1980)
Dear mother and oma of:
Bob & Jayne Hamersma — Vineland, Ont.
Rob, Virginia, Beth Anne
Ann & Jack Griffin — Lakefield, Ont.
Vikki, Kyle
Bobbi Holtom — San Clemente, Calif.
Aaron
Jayne & Stephen Estabrooks — Russell, Ont.
Matthew, Joshua
Funeral service was held on Monday, Nov. 13, 1989, at Cephas Chr. Ref. Church in Peterborough, Ont., Rev. J. Poelman officiating.

"And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." (Ps. 23:6)
The Lord took to himself

WILLIAM KISTEMAKER

at the age of 86, on Saturday, Nov. 11, 1989.
Lovingly remembered by his wife Mary Kistemaker of Grimsby, Ont., and children:
Simon & Jean Kistemaker — Clinton, Miss.
John Kistemaker — Hamilton, Ont.
Evelyn & Henry Klok — Abbotsford, B.C.
13 grandchildren and 11 great-grandchildren.
Funeral service was held on Tuesday, Nov. 14, 1989.
Correspondence address: Shalom Manor, 12 Bartlett Ave., Grimsby, ON L3M 4N5.

Classified rates

Births	$30.00
Marriages & Engagements	$35.00
Anniversaries	$40.00
2-column anniversaries	**$80.00**
Obituaries	$40.00
Notes of thanks	$30.00
Birthdays	$30.00

All other one-column classified advertisements: $12.50 per column inch. NOTE: Minimum fee is $20.00. Letter under file number, $30.00 extra. Photos: $20.00 additional charge. (Free when published with anniversary announcement celebrating 50 years or more.)
Calvinist Contact will not be responsible for any errors due to handwritten or phoned-in advertisements.

OBITUARIES
Obituaries should be composed as they are to appear in *Calvinist Contact*. A sheet with information sent by funeral homes is not acceptable since it leads to errors and confusion.
The $40.00 rate for obituaries covers any length up to six column inches. Calvinist Contact reserves the right to charge for additional column inches at the rate of $12.50 per column inch.

NEWLYWEDS
Non-subscribing newlyweds whose wedding announcement with their future address appears in *Calvinist Contact* will receive a letter offering a first-year subscription for only $15.00! To facilitate matters, we encourage those who request and pay for the wedding announcement to enclose $15.00 and the couple's future address.

Calvinist Contact Publishing Ltd.
4-261 Martindale Rd.,
St. Catharines, ON L2W 1A1.
Phone: (416) 682-8311
FAX: (416) 682-8313

Thanks

DE LEEUW DEN BOUTER:
Dirk N. de Leeuw den Bouter
March 10, 1919 — Oct. 31, 1989
We thankfully acknowledge the overwhelming sympathy, support and comfort shown to us with the passing and departure into glory of our dear friend and uncle D.N. de Leeuw den Bouter. His memory will be our constant companion.
Address: Fam. P.G. de Jager, 393 Renda St., Kingston, ON K7M 5X9.

Thanks

TIGCHELAAR:
We hereby would like to thank all our children, grandchildren, relatives, friends and neighbours who honoured us with their presence at our open house for our 50th wedding anniversary. Also, thank you for the many cards, best wishes and beautiful flower arrangements. It was a great beautiful day, one we will never forget. Above all, we thank our loving God and Father who made all this possible.
George and Betty Tigchelaar

VANDERKEEMEL:
We thank everyone who has made our 50th wedding anniversary as well as my 80th birthday so very special. For the best wishes, cards, flowers and prayers we are sincerely grateful. We wish for you all God's blessings in the years to come.
Mike & Hilda VanderKeemel,
Holland Christian Homes, C709, Brampton, ON L6V 3N2.

WIERSMA:
Paul and Grace Wiersma take this opportunity to thank all their relatives and friends who have made their 50th wedding anniversary such a memorable occasion — Glen Morris, Ont.

Births

POTT:
With thankfulness unto God, we, Arnold and Brenda, joyfully announce the birth of our fourth child

KATHERINE DIANA

born July 28, 1989. She is the fourth grandchild for Gilbert and Elisabeth Janssen of Chesley, Ont., and the fifth grandchild of Andrew and Nancy Pott of Orangeville, Ont.
Home address: R.R.#2, Grand Valley, ON L0N 1G0.

For Rent

For rent in beautiful Dundas, approx. 2 miles from McMaster University/Hospital, a bed-sitting room, kitchen and bathroom at $400 per month. Call (416) 628-2145 after 6 p.m. or (416) 689-8062 anytime.

Marriages

VANDERMEER-BRUINING:
Thankful to the Lord, who has brought us together, creating new happiness

AKKE BRUINING
and
HENRY VANDERMEER

wish to announce their marriage.
We are grateful for the loving support of our children, who will caringly participate in our ceremony, which will take place, D.V., on Saturday, Dec. 9, 1989, at 3 p.m. in Williamsburg Chr. Ref. Church, Rev. Wieger de Jong officiating.
Future address: Riverside Heights, R.R.#1, Morrisburg, ON K0C 1X0.

VAN HELDEN-LISE:
Desiring God's will for our lives and believing that includes each other

MARGARET
and
WILBERT

together with their parents Mr. and Mrs. Arie Van Helden and Mr. and Mrs. Louis Lise, invite you to share in their joy as they are united in the Lord Jesus Christ on Saturday, Dec. 23, 1989, D.V., at 7 p.m. in Georgetown Chr. Ref. Church, Trafalgar Rd., Georgetown, Ont., pastor Henry Lunshof officiating.
Future address: R.R.#3, Hollen Rd., Moorefield, ON N0G 2K0.

Obituaries

On Nov. 11, 1989, the Lord took to himself our beloved sister and sister-in-law

AALTJE DE WEERD-DROST

in her 70th year.
Beloved wife of Jentinus De Weerd.
Lords Day I.
Jane Drost-De Weerd — Drayton, Ont.
Roelof & Stien Drost — the Neth.
Ann & Thys Rumph — Alma, Ont.
Jan & Pieterdina Drost — the Neth.
Herman & Lummy Drost — the Neth.
Koop & Ann Drost — Listowel, Ont.
Alice & Jan Smit — Jarvis, Ont.
Pieterdina & Willem Drost — the Neth.
Jenny De Weerd-Steenbergen — Brantford, Ont.
Predeceased by one brother, Lukas, and one sister Henny.
Drayton, Ont.

Classified

Obituaries

On Nov. 10, 1989, the Lord took unto himself

DIRKJE A. KLINGENBERG
(nee Westerman)

at the age of 59, of Ingersoll, Ont.
"I cried out to God for help; I cried out to God to hear me." (Ps. 77:1)
She will be lovingly remembered by her husband John and their children and grandchildren.
Dear daughter of Mr. and Mrs. S.G. Westerman of Brampton, Ont.
Dear sister of:
Gep & Bep Westerman
— Hoofddorp, the Neth.
Alys Westerman — Amsterdam, the Neth.
Liz & Jack Klooster — Kitchener, Ont.
"Great is thy Faithfulness."

"Therefore, they are before the throne of God, And serve him day and night in his temple ... Never again will they hunger, never again will they thirst ... For the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their Shepherd; He will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." (Rev. 7:15-17)
On Nov. 12, 1989, at the age of 53, the Lord in his infinite wisdom, took home our dear husband and father

BERT LOOYENGA

Always lovingly remembered by his wife, daughter and son.
Loved husband of Ann Looyenga.
Loved father of Brenda, Anthony and the late Denise Looyenga.
Services were held at Bethel Chr. Ref. Church in Acton, Ont., on Tuesday, Nov. 14, 1989, Rev. D. Miedema officiated.
Correspondence address: 30 Mowbray Place, Acton, ON L7J 2J8.

"Safe in the arms of Jesus. Safe on his gentle breast. There by his love o'er shaded, sweetly my soul shall rest."
On Tuesday, Nov. 7, 1989, the Lord in his wisdom, suddenly took our dear grandson, nephew and cousin

KENNY OOSTERHOF

in his 21st year.
Fondly remembered and sadly missed by:
Trudy Oosterhof-Dekens
Joe & Rita Oosterhof
Cor & Clara Oosterhof
Nick & Alice Baratta
Eiko & Diana Oosterhof
Bob & Hilda Cunningham
Peter & Helen Oosterhof
Ted & Lorette Woods
Clarence & Simone Grainger
and 20 cousins.
Correspondence address: R.R.#2, Grand Valley, ON L0N 1G0.

Real Estate

ADA REALTY LTD.
6012 Ada Blvd.
Edmonton, AB
T5W 4N9
(403) 471-1814
Sid Vandermeulen
Contact us first when you think of moving to Edmonton and district.
Het vertrouwde adres.

Miscellaneous

Are you moving to Ponoka, Alberta? I would like to ship a wardrobe. It's a dresser, six feet high, taken apart and packed, approx. 100 kg. Contact Paul Rodenburg, 230 Main St., Harrietsville, ON N0L 1N0. Phone (519) 269-3696.

For Sale

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A unique church history—an immigrant church confronts Canada's urban society.

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and a folder of essays on Understanding the Middle East ($1.50).
Write:
The Back to God Hour
P.O. Box 5070
Burlington, ON L7R 3Y8

Miscellaneous

Finally it's here!

You always longed to have an organ for yourself, an organ that sounds like the one in church, right? Well it's now possible. This organ is built for church or for your home. Thanks to "sampled wave processing" which means that the sound of organ pipes have been digitally recorded note by note. The organ then plays back actual pipe sounds. The sound is so close to pipe that on a recording it would be virtually impossible to tell from the real thing. No rhythm, whistles or drums, just good organ sound. Come in and play it, you will be convinced the same as I am.

The price? only $12,000.00 plus tax.

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Van Geest

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Tel. (416) 336-3655

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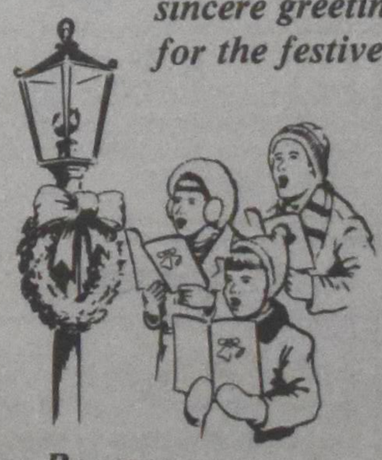
It's our pleasure to convey sincere greetings and best wishes for the festive season



Cor Bonsma
Lorna Dixon

Darlene St. Louis
Jennie Witteveen

CHRISTMAS GIFT IDEAS

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- TIES

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Ancaster, ON
(Beside Big V)
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VANDERLAAN'S MEN'S CLOTHIERS

Classified/Events

Help Wanted

CARING FOR KIDS Mutual Support Systems, a residential program for children, is looking for families in the Niagara Peninsula that would provide foster care for a child in their own home. Please reply to:

Mutual Support Systems
R.R.#1, Perry Rd.,
Wellandport, ON
L0R 2J0
(416) 899-2311

Married couple to work on Central Alberta dairy farm. Housing available. Please call (403) 784-3801.

Full-time **housekeeper and nanny** wanted. There are four children in the family, ages 2-10 years. Please send references to: P.O. Box 69, Foxboro, ON K0K 2B0.

We need one full-time person (40 hrs.). Hours include one evening (Fri.), and every other Saturday. Work includes: serving customers, some typing, and all other aspects of Christian book selling. Requirements include a pleasing personality, willingness to work hard, eagerness to learn and a love for good books. Apply to store manager Mrs. Ina Klaassens or to owner Gerry Denbok: (416) 637-9151 (store), (416) 639-1075 (home).

The Family Christian Bookstore
750 Guelph Line, Burlington, ON
L7R 3N5

Require qualified **herdsperson** for responsible revisory cattle care and milking. Will train. Three-bedroom house available. Starting salary $25,000 per year. Please supply resume to: Zandbergen Farms Ltd., R.R. #2, Brinston, ON K0E 1C0.

Teachers

AGASSIZ, B.C.: Agassiz Christian School requires a **primary** teacher effective April 1, 1990, with a possible view for employment for the 1990/91 school year. Interested applicants please send resume and/or inquiries to: Mr. Rick Esselink, Principal, Agassiz Christian School, Box 323, Agassiz, BC V0M 1A0 Tel. (604) 796-9310 (school), (604) 796-3209 (home).

Christian Education
in
Canada's Capital

OTTAWA, Ont.: If you are a specialist in **Remedial Education** or **Kindergarten,** are looking for new challenges and rewards, consider: **OTTAWA CHRISTIAN SCHOOL**. An opening is available March or September 1990. Please inform us about your abilities, ask about our needs. Write: Wm. Van Dyke, Principal, Ottawa Christian School, 2191 Benjamin Ave., Ottawa, ON K2A 1P6. Phone (613) 722-5836.

TORONTO, Ont.: Toronto Central Christian School will have an opening in the **Primary grades** commencing January 1990. Please address your inquiries or resume to Jack Couperus, Principal, T.C.C.S., 55 Salisbury Ave., Toronto, ON M4X 1C5, or phone (416) 968-2036.

Help Wanted

Director/Developer

Edmonton, Alberta

NATIVE MISSIONS

In keeping with a growing program of ministering to the needs of native peoples in Canada, the National Committee of the CCRCC for ministry to Indian and Metis is looking for a person to assume a challenging position and be a part of a NEW BEGINNING — working, worshipping community!

The successful applicant will:
- have a knowledge of and ability to work with indigenous peoples;
- have a solid pastoral background and/or experience in a related field of human services;
- be able to initiate and implement new programs;
- demonstrate a commitment to the Christian Reformed Church and be able to communicate a Reformed Christian world view.

Direct inquiries or application and resume to:
Chairman George Fernhout
Box 9, Site 10, R.R. 4, Edmonton, AB T5E 5S7
Tel. (403) 921-2270; office phone (403) 422-5187;
fax (403) 422-5632

Deadline three weeks from date of publication

Help wanted

Christian Reformed World Missions of Canada

is inviting applications for a clerk/bookkeeper, to begin by late December, 1989, or early January, 1990. Applicants should have experience in office and accounting procedures as well as familiarity with payroll and taxation matters, computers, and word processing. An active interest in missions and a personal commitment to the Lord are a must. Interested persons should send their resume by December 11, 1989, to the attention of:

Mr. Bill Termorshuizen
Christian Reformed World Missions
P.O. Box 5070, 3475 Mainway
Burlington, ON L7R 3Y8

Teachers

London District Christian Secondary School

We require two teachers to fill maternity leaves beginning **Jan. 8, 1990.** One is required for a **Mathematics** position and the other is required for a combination **French/English** position. There is a good possibility that both positions would become permanent during the second semester. Please send your letter of application, resume, and a personal statement of your faith commitment to:

Mr. H. Kooy, Principal
c/o London District Chr. Sec. School
24 Braesyde Ave., London, ON N5W 1V3
Phone (519) 455-4360

Events

Events

"Family farming in the future"

Annual Convention and Banquet

Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario

Date: Wednesday, December 6, 1989, D.V.

Time: 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. Banquet: 5:30 p.m.

Location: Italian Canadian Club of Guelph, 135 Ferguson St., Guelph, Ontario

Keynote speaker: Sister Thomas More Bertels, Faculty & Author, Silver Lake College Manitowac, Wisconsin, USA
"Family farming in the future"

Afternoon speakers: Panel discussion: *"What vision for family farming?"*. Moderator: Bill Jongejan. Penlists: Rita Burak, Deputy Minister, OMAF; George Brinkman, Agricultural Economist, University of Guelph; Brewster Kneen, Food Systems Analyst, Toronto.

Banquet speaker: Padre Clifford Waite, Chaplain & Writer, Brantford, Ontario
"Family unity — the importance of communication"

Special features: "Simple Gospel" — Male Quartet, Wainfleet, Ont.
"Sight & Sound — God's Creation" — Adrian & Ann Kloet
— a slide presentation —

For pre-registration, call CFFO office, Guelph - (519) 837-1620
Deadline: Friday noon, December 1.

Committee of Concerned Members

of the Christian Reformed Church in North America

sponsors a

PUBLIC DEBATE

between

Rev. Andrew Kuyvenhoven, pastor of Bethel CRC, Waterdown, Ont., and former editor of *The Banner*

and

Dr. Robert Godfrey, Professor of Church History, Westminster Seminary, Escondido, California.

Topic: "The state of health of the Christian Reformed Church
Date: Monday, December 11, 1989, at 8 p.m.
Place: Redeemer College Auditorium, Ancaster, Ont.

Everyone welcome! Free will offering to help defray expenses. For further info. contact: **Mark Zylstra (416) 562-5196.**

Join us on another trip to

ISRAEL

D.V., Monday, February 26 - March 8, 1990

Visit Mt. Carmel, Nazareth, Sea of Galilee, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Caesarea, etc.
Tour price **$1,859.00** from Toronto with optional stop-over in Holland.
1st Class Hotels — A-1 Israeli Tour Guide

Your Hosts: **Pastor Al and Alida Dreise**
(416) 627-5080 (home) (416) 564-1225 (office)
Pastor Ralph and Anne Koops
(519) 623-3234 (home) (519) 623-8151 (office)

"Advent Wijdingsdienst"

An evening of Dutch advent and Christmas music for the elderly in the Niagara Peninsula. Scripture readings, choir, brass ensemble, organ and communal singing. Musical direction: Gerzinus Hoekstra. **At 8 p.m., Covenant CRC, 278 Parnell Rd., St. Catharines, Ont.**

Send your questions to Peter and Marja c/o Calvinist Contact. Confidentiality is assured.

Events/Classified

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Calendar of Events

Dec. 2 Choir and organ concert by Leendert Kooy's O.C.M.A., with organist Andre Knevel. At 8 p.m. St. Paul's Anglican Church, (Dundas and Wellington), **Woodstock**, Ont. For tickets call (519) 539-0855.

Dec. 2 Organ recital by John Wm. Vandertuin at St. James Anglican Church, **Brantford**, Ont.

Dec. 2 50th anniversary Jubilee service of the Back to God Hour at 7:30 p.m. in the CRC, **New Westminster**, B.C. Speaker: Dr. Joel Nederhood.

Dec. 2 "Adopt-A-Con" organizational and instructional meeting from 10 a.m. - 3 p.m. at John Knox Christian School, 82 McLaughlin Rd. S., **Brampton**, Ont. Bring your own lunch.

Dec. 3 & 10 "Nederlandse Kerstzangdienst" at 7:30 p.m., Emmanuel Reformed Church, 170 Clarke St., **Woodstock**, Ont.

Dec. 6 CFFO annual convention and banquet at Italian Canadian Club, 135 Ferguson St., **Guelph**, Ont. Convention at 10 a.m., banquet at 5:30 p.m. For info. call (519) 837-1620.

Dec. 6 CFFO annual convention and banquet at Italian Canadian Club, 135 Ferguson St., **Guelph**, Ont. Convention starts at 10 a.m., banquet at 5:30 p.m. For pre-registration call (519) 837-1620. Deadline December 1.

Dec. 9 Christmas concert by three London choirs plus Andre Knevel at the organ. At 7:30 p.m., Dundas St. Centre United Church, **London**, Ont.

Dec. 10 "Advent Wijdingsdienst," an evening of Dutch advent and Christmas music, with scripture readings, choir, brass ensemble, organ and communal singing. Musical direction Gerzinus Hoekstra. At 8 p.m., Covenant CRC, **St. Catharines**, Ont.

Dec. 10 Handel's "Messiah," performed by "Laudate Dominum Choir" (dir. Barbara Mavin) and organist Dick DeJonge. At 8 p.m., First Presb. Church, **Chatham**, Ont. Free will offering.

Dec. 11 Public debate between Andrew Kuyvenhoven and Robert Godfrey on the topic: "The state of health of the CRC" at 8 p.m., Redeemer College Auditorium, **Ancaster**, Ont. Sponsored by CCM of the CRC. For info. call Mark Zylstra at (416) 562-5196.

Dec. 15 Christmas celebration sponsored by self-help group for surviving spouses, at 8 p.m., Maranatha CRC, **St. Catharines**, Ont.

Dec. 16 Christmas concert by Leendert Kooy's O.C.M.A. with organist Andre Knevel. At 8 p.m., Willowdale United Church, **Willowdale**, Ont. For tickets call (416) 636-9779.

Dec. 17 Annual Christmas concert by St. Thomas & District Male Choir and St. Thomas Ladies' Choir at 8 p.m., First United Church, **St. Thomas**, Ont.

Dec. 20 Christmas concert by Leendert Kooy's O.C.M.A. with organist Andre Knevel. At 8 p.m., Rehoboth CRC, **Bowmanville**, Ont. For tickets call (416) 636-9779.

Dec. 17 Christmas concert by the Brampton Chr. Choral Society "Praise the Lord (dir. Wm. Hoekstra) and organist Wim van Suydam. At 8 p.m., Second CRC, **Brampton**, Ont.

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Dutch

Ons Kerstfeest van 1918

Lenie Verruyt

Het is nu 70 jaar geleden, en ik zie het nog voor mij als de dag van gisteren. Het is de avond van de eerste Kerstdag.

Wij zitten gezellig te schemeren in de huiskamer. In de kamer zijn twee bedsteden. In vaders- en moeders bedstede is achter tegen de muur een houten krib getimmerd, waar altijd het kleinste kindje in sliep. Wij hadden ook een grote keuken, waar wij veel in woonden, en een zolder waar de oudste kinderen sliepen en waar vader zijn kleermakerswerkplaats had.

Onze kamer was versierd ter ere van het Kerstfeest met wat groen en hulst. Op de platte pijp van de kachel staat de chocoladeketel. Dat is net een grote porceleinen theepot; het heeft een groen randje en een rieten hengsel. Het ruikt zo lekker. Wij zitten rond de kachel met ons vijven: vader, moeder, een broertje en een zusje, want dat andere broertje en zusje waren toen nog niet geboren. Het kleinste broertje ligt nog in de krib.

Ik ben acht jaar, de oudste. Een kerstboom hadden wij toen nog niet. Of het was omdat vader en moeder er geen geld voor hadden, òf dat ze toen nog niet zo erg in de mode waren weet ik niet meer. Het is ook al zo lang geleden. Ik voelde me toch rijk, en wij waren erg gelukkig zo met elkaar op de eerste Kerstdag.

Nu werd het tijd om de lamp aan te steken, want electrisch licht hadden wij toen ook nog niet. Een mooie lamp hadden wij, met een kralen rand eromheen. Er was ook nog geen radio toen, maar vader las ons een mooi Kerstverhaal voor. Dat was onze eerste Kerstdag.

Maar tweede Kerstdag, daar konden wij bijna niet op wachten, want dan vierden wij het Kerstfeest van de Zondagschool. Vader, die ook een Zondagschoolmeester was, had de oudste kinderen twee-stemmige versjes leren zingen, en ik mocht er ook bij, al was ik nog maar acht jaar. "In Bethlehems stal" en "Heerlijk klonk het lied der engelen" vond ik wel de mooiste." Je kon zomaar in je verbeelding het kribje van Jezus, Jozef en Maria, in de stal met de beesten zien. En ook de engelen die de blijde boodschap aan de herders vertelden.

Eindelijk was het dan zo ver. Er gingen al mensen voorbij. De vaders en moeders met de kleine broertjes en zusjes, want die mochten ook meekomen. Ik kan het nog allemaal zo goed zien. Zo vredig, alle mensen kwamen lopen naar de kerk. Er was geen parkeerterrein nodig, want auto's waren er nog maar net. Alleen Jan Pastoor had er een, en wij mochten op de treeplank meerijden. Sommige jongelui kwamen op de fiets. Vader had ook een fiets. Moeder niet, zij heeft nooit fietsen geleerd.

Zo gingen wij dan in schemerdonker, met al de andere mensen mee, op weg naar de kerk. De vaders en moeders met de kleintjes mochten voor deze gelegenheid in de zijbanken zitten *met* elkaar. De zijbanken waren eigenlijk de mannenbanken. Wij kinderen zaten in het middenvak. De grote kachel achterin gaf lekker warmte af. Het grote orgel speelde al, en het groene gordijntje waar de orgeltrapper achter stond waaide zachtjes heen en weer.

Toen ieder zijn plaats gevonden had, de oudsten van 12 jaar, die van de Zondagschool af gingen, zaten op de voorste rijen, want die werden later apart toegesproken en dan kregen ze allemaal een bijbeltje met hun naam en een tekst erin. Zij moesten ook verzen opzeggen uit de Bijbel en aan hen werden vragen gesteld. Toen ik 12 jaar was mocht ik Lucas 2:1-20 opzeggen — heel gewichtig, hoor, zo alleen opstaan en al die vaders, moeders en meesters naar je luisteren.

Nu heeft ieder zijn plaats gevonden, en vader komt naar voren, want hij heeft de leiding bij het zingen. Wat klinkt dat prachtig, onze tweestemmige versjes; dan zingen wij nog veel meer met alle mensen bij elkaar.

Nu wordt het tijd voor ons eerste kopje chocolademelk met een speculaasje. Boer Gijkhorst heeft ons een hele bus melk gegeven, dus er komt nog veel meer. Ook de kleintjes in de zijbanken worden niet vergeten.

Nu moet het weer stil worden, want juffrouw Wilmpje Hoosbeek gaat nu het verhaal van Jezus' geboorte vertellen; dat doet ze heel goed. Na een andere tractatie en wat zingen komt nu meester Hoogerwaard naar voren om ons een Kertverhaal te vertellen; dat kan hij toch zo mooi, maar hij is ook schoolmeester.

Dan komt de uitdeling van de boekjes: *Ouwe Bram, Jessica's eerste gebed, Van Bob en Bep en Brammetje, De boze koster, De vrolijke bakker die altijd lacht*. Ik kreeg *"Jessica's eerste gebed*. Dat vergeet ik van mijn leven nooit meer. Telkens als vader er uit voor las moest ik huilen om die arme Jessica, die op haar blote voetjes, zonder manteltje, in de kou liep en ze had ook zo'n honger. Dan zei vader, "Zullen wij er voor vanavond maar mee ophouden?" Dan snikte ik: "Ja, ik heb zo'n pijn in mijn buik." Maar vader wist wel beter.

Dan was er voor elk gezin nog een mooie scheurkalender. "Een hand vol koren" heette dat. Daar zat zo'n dikke blok op met 365 blaadjes. Voor wij naar huis gingen, kregen alle kinderen, ook de kinderen in de mannenbanken, een zakje met een krentebol, sinaasappel, speculaasjes en kerstkransjes, van die mooie chocolade met die witte spikkeltjes erop. Daar deed je heel zuinig mee, ook met de speculaasjes.

Wat een ongekende rijkdom voor ons, en zo weinig eigenlijk als je het vergelijkt met wat kinderen nu allemaal willen en krijgen op het Kerstfeest. Het had wel twee uren geduurd. De grote mensen vonden het wel wat lang. Maar wij niet, hoor. Toch wilden wij ook graag naar huis om de krentebol en sinaasappel op te eten. Zoiets kregen wij niet elke dag.

Het is nu donker buiten. Er was toen ook bij ons nog geen straatverlichting. Griezelig hoor, wij hielden stevig vaders- en moeders hand, sommige mensen brachten hun "carbied" — lantaarn van hun fiets mee en zo vonden wij allemaal onze weg naar huis. Nu is het Kerstfeest, *ons* Kerstfeest, dan weer over in het jaar 1918.

Maar de klanken van het Kerstfeest galmen door tot aan Nieuw Jaar:

De Heiland is geboren
In Bethlehems schaam'le stal
Die voor miljoenen vromen
Een redder wezen zal.

Lenie Verruyt woont in Victoria, B.C.

"En het geschiedde" .... Lucas 2:1a

Kerstfeest vieren doet men met gemengde gevoelens. Voor de één betekent het: een paar vrije dagen, gezelligheid thuis. Voor een ander, die alleen is of ziek op bed ligt: heimwee naar vroeger, toen alles zo anders was.

En juist met Kerst kan niemand me gebruiken, iedereen heeft zo zijn eigen afspraken. Gebeurde er maar wat .... Geschiedde er maar wat .... Want zo begint het Kerstevangelie: en het geschiedde .... en dan volgt er een hele reeks gebeurtenissen achter elkaar, enerverend, indrukwekkend.

Maar bij ons? Geen ster als goede gids naar Bethlehem. Geen engelen die het "Ere zij God" zingen. Geen herders in het veld, wijzen uit het Oosten. Ook geen Kind in de kribbe. Want het Kind werd man en de man is gedood, stond op en ging heen. Voelen we ons zo niet machteloos?

Je wilt wel eens wat *zien* om te kunnen geloven. Als er niets te zien is, wat zul je dan geloven? De Bijbel maakt het ons niet gemakkelijk. Die zegt: er is eerst wat te horen-verhalen, woorden, het Kerstevangelie, en als je gehoord hebt, echt gehoord, dan mag je geloven. En pas als je gelooft is er wat te zien.

Dat is de omgekeerde weg. Eerst geloven en dan pas zien. Eerst geloven, dan vallen de schellen van je ogen en kun je zien dat God ons lief heeft. Daarom moet Kerstfeest het hebben van verhalen vertellen. Van vroeger en nu.

Lucas zegt: en het geschiedde .... Soms kun je ervaren wat zo'n verhaal doet in je leven. Luister ook deze dagen maar veel naar die verhalen .... en .... moge er ook nu wat geschieden .... namelijk dit, dat we Jezus zien, opnieuw, met nieuwe ogen.

M.M. den Hollander

Ere zij God,
vrede op aarde!

Gezegend Kerstfeest
en Nieuwjaar
toegewenst.

The management and staff of

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Geen Kerstboompje voor Hilda Schlager

Herman de Jong

Het huisje staat tegen de Niagara Escarpment. Vroeger woonden er seizoenarbeiders. Ooit zat er witte verf op de muren. Nu is het huis grijs. Alleen rondom ramen en deurposten bewegen schilfers verf in de wind die van de escarpment neerkomt. Grijs het huis, grijs en smoezelig ook de vrouw die daar woont. Moederziel alleen, maar moeder was ze nooit.

Negentig jaar is ze, die Hilda Schlager. Ze is als de saamgebogen vrouw uit de Bijbel. Hoofd en verstand gaan haar schrale lichaam ver vooruit. Een hoofd dat zich verzet tegen het samengekrompen lijf. Ze wil meer dan ze kan. Op een stoel klimmen bijvoorbeeld om de doos met rode belletjes, zilveren slierten en witte engeltjes vanaf het oude kabinet te halen. Maar haar scherp verstand zegt dat ze dat niet moet doen omdat ze zo twee jaar geleden haar heup brak en bijna in een nursing-home terecht gekomen was. Met hand en tand verzet Hilda zich daar tegen. Nursing homes ... oude mensen die zouden proberen haar verleden uit te lokken; jonge verpleegsters met lachende gezichten.

Met haar stok kan ze net bij de doos. Ze tikt de doos tot op de rand van het kabinet. Ze haalt het vuile hoofdkussen van haar bed en legt het tegen het kabinet. Laten er maar wat bellen breken, lang leven doet ze toch niet meer. Ofschoon ... *groszmutter* was 105 toen ze stierf.

Nieuwsgierig opent ze de doos. *Dat ist ja schade,* twee zijn er kapot. Maar beter twee kapotte bellen dan heupen. Voldaan aait ze één van haar veertien poezen. Nu nog een kerstboompje halen. Die groeien in het wild, daar waar de struiken op de glooiing van de escarpment overgaan in bos. Bij *Weinachten* behoort een kerstboom.

Hilda gelooft niet in een machtig Opperwezen en een kindje in een kribbe. Haar scherp-analyserend verstand (ooit studeerde ze wiskunde aan één der bekendste Duitse Universiteiten) kon dat niet aannemen. Op 49-jarige leeftijd kwam ze naar Canada. Na twee jaar aan een verpakkingsmachine promoveerde men haar tot boekhoudster. Zo kwam de wiskunde nog goed van pas.

Een kerstboom. Ze zal Kerstfeest vieren met haar poezen. Die krijgen wat extra's. Net als de vorige jaren zal ze naar het kaarslicht kijken en terugdenken aan heel vroeger, toen het leven nog mooi was. Ze zal de periode waarin haar ziel en lichaam gebroken werden weer naar de achtergrond dringen met wiskundige nauwkeurigheid.

Gelukkig staan de kerstboompjes aan de rand van het bos. Liever had ze ergens gewoond waar geen bossen waren. Je kunt de duisternis onder de bomen niet vertrouwen. Daar schuilen soldaten. Russische soldaten met rode lippen in met roet besmeerde gezichten. Vijf Russische soldaten die grijnzen als ze tussen de bomen de schim van een wapperende jurk zien. "Ga door de bossen, en laat je niet zien op de straten en wegen," had haar vriendin gezegd. De soldaten bulderen van het lachen als ze haar van boom tot boom jagen. Ze struikelt en haar groene camouflagejurk laat witte benen zien ....

Hilda staat in het achterportaaltje van het grijze huisje. Ze kan het hoofd niet heffen om te zien of de kust veilig is. Of het bos veilig is! Maar er zal niemand zijn. Alleen de Public Health nurse bezoekt haar geregeld. En vlak voor de verkiezingen wisten de enumerators haar ook te vinden. Die waren weggevlucht. Schrokken van het smerige oude vrouwtje wiens mummelmondje siste: *"schnell ... you go away ... schweinerei, das ist ja schweinerei!"* Eén van de dames struikelde over het lijntje van aaneengeknoopte schoenveters..

Langs dat lijntje zaaide Hilda haar groenten, pootte haar bonen en aardappelen in een tuin die veel te groot voor haar was. De Public Health nurse had verwonderd gestaan. Wist toch dat het tuinwerk en de frisse lucht haar patiente oud hadden doen worden.

De aardappelen liggen nu in de kelder. En in de lege slaapkamer, waar tegen de muren fruitkistjes staan, gevuld met dikke wiskunde boeken en jaargangen vergeelde *Globe and Mails,* liggen de appels te rimpelen die ze elk jaar stiekem uit een nabije boomgaard haalt." *One apple a day keeps the doctor away"* ... dat wist ze in Duitsland al.

Ze probeert in haar oude rubberlaarzen te stappen. Dat gaat steeds moeilijker. Maar een intelligente dame zoals Hilda weet overal een oplossing voor. Ze hurkt en ploft dan neer op de koude leemvloer van het portaaltje. De laarzen legt ze plat voor zich. Zo schuivelt ze haar beentjes in de laarzen tot eindelijk haar handen die verder omhoog kunnen trekken. Dan kruipt ze op handen en voeten naar de waspaal buiten en hijst zich daaraan op. Onthouden dit, denkt Hilda. Zal haar te pas komen volgend voorjaar, wanneer ze opnieuw de tuin zal spitten.

Door de struiken strompelt ze naar het stuk grond waar ze de kerstbomen weet. Even moet ze door een stuk bos. Ze veegt de dode takken weg met haar schop, bang dat ze weer zal vallen en een heup breken. Voor ze het weet staat er onder haar neus een mooi boompje, maar die is te klein voor al de belletjes en engeltjes. Wacht, daar staat een grotere.

Ze steekt de schop in de grond. Hoort ze iets? Terwijl ze haar nekje probeert te draaien, ziet ze in een flits de twee soldaten. Nee, het zijn maar opgeschoten jongens met zwarte leren jasjes en zwarte broeken, gestoken in zwarte puntige laarzen. Jongens die bezig zijn een grote kerstboom uit de grond te graven. Zwijgend loeren ze naar het heksje. Ze schrokken zich het apezuur, maar nu grijnzen hun doorvoede gezichten. Hier is lol te beleven!

Met de handen in de zakken van hun te nauwe broeken komen ze op haar af, zien een gezichtje waaruit boosheid vonkt, en wijdopengesperde ogen waarin een grenzeloze haat. Ineens durven ze niet verder. *"She's a witch, a real witch,"* fluistert de ene jongen tegen de andere. Hilda maait met haar schop en zo vlug als haar beentjes haar kunnen dragen, hobbelt ze weg. Hijgend schuift ze de grendel op de deur van het achterportaaltje. Door het raampje ziet ze de jongens aan de rand van haar groentetuin. Verwonderd. *"Hey, there's a real old house there!"* Dan slenteren ze weg.

De rubberlaarzen trekken een spoor van modder van de keuken naar de kamer, waar een oliekachel golven hitte over de poezen blaast. Ze slaat drie katten van haar leunstoel, waarvan de zitting smerig en de rugleuning als nieuw is. Voorover-leunend probeert ze haar stotende adem in bedwang te krijgen.

Plotseling ziet ze bloedvlekken op haar zwarte jurk die van ouderdom groen geworden is. Er is bloed op haar benen en op het groene mos onder haar. Wegdringen, wegdringen, die gedachte! Wegdringen naar de diepste schuilplaatsen van haar onderbewustzijn. Dertig jaar lang heeft ze dat gedaan. Ze had geen psychiater meer nodig. Zelfs droomde ze er niet meer over. En nu, nu brengen twee grijnzende gezichten van twee opgeschoten jonge kerels het beeld dat haar hele leven verbloeid en verbruikt heeft het weer te voorschijn.

Boos slaat ze naar een poes die op haar schoot probeert te springen. Er is geen God! Er is geen kind in de kribbe! *Das ist immer ....* Nu moet ze weer sterk zijn, weg die tranen. Maar de tranen blijven komen. Ze ziet de flesjes medicijnen op het fruitkistje naast de stoel. Weer vergeten ze in te nemen! "Brief memory loss," zegt de Public Health nurse," *not bad for a girl your age."*

De tranen blijven komen. Dan, voor het eerst sinds lange jaren, verandert er iets in haar. Zoals de mist weg-ebt over de fruitbomen, zo voelt ze de haat uit zich vloeien en voor het eerst in haar lange leven geeft ze toe aan een verdriet dat zo groot is dat het alleen door Iemand anders kan worden weggedragen.

Hilda Schlager viert Kerst zonder boom. Ook nog zonder God. Maar er ligt een Bijbel verborgen achter de wiskundeboeken in de fruitkistjes.

Herman de Jong woont in Jordan Station, Ont.

Books

The gift of possibilities: stocking stuffers for young readers

Reviewed by Margaret Hoggard

Jacob Have I Loved, by Katherine Paterson. New York: Avon Books, 1980. Softcover, $3.95; ages 12-adult.

"If, in our Freudian orientation, we speak of the basic conflict as that between parent and child, the Bible, which is the earth from which I spring, is much more concerned with the relationships among brothers and sisters. 'A friend loveth at all times,' says the writer of Proverbs, 'but a brother is born for adversity.' They never taught us the second half of that verse in Sunday School."

The above passage was taken from Katherine Paterson's acceptance speech for the John Newbery Medal, awarded to her in 1981 for *Jacob Have I Loved*. Paterson is one of the fine contemporary writers for young people whose works prove Christian values can be found in mainstream children's literature; and such works are receiving critical recognition.

In *Jacob Have I Loved,* she has crafted a powerful story as old as Cain and Abel. "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated," whispers Rachel Ellison's grandmother, as time and time again, she has to make sacrifices for her sickly but beautiful and gifted twin sister.

Outwardly compliant but inwardly rebellious, Rachel battles the turmoil within herself. This wonderful story affirms that pain and joy exist side by side, but life is filled with possibilities.

The Glory Girl, by Betsy Byars. New York: Viking Press, 1983. Softcover, $4.95; ages 10-13.

"The Glory family was singing in the living room, learning a new song, while Anna fixed supper in the kitchen.

"The worst thing that could happen to a person in this family, Anna decided as she waited for the water to boil, was not being able to carry or beat a tune."

Anna Glory is the only one in her family who can't sing, a decided handicap when that family is the Glory Gospel Singers who depend on their music for their livelihood. Relegated to the back of drafty auditoriums where she sells Glory albums and tapes during intermission, Anna is not very happy with her place in life. And, frankly, her family is more Christian on stage than off.

Then, her Uncle Newt is released from jail, changing the lives of all the Glorys. Anna learns her true worth and readers gain a strong message about being truly Christian in the book's dramatic conclusion.

Dear Mr. Henshaw, by Beverly Cleary; illustrated by Paul O. Zelinsky. William Morrow and Company, 1983. Softcover, $4.50; ages 8-12.

One of Leigh Bott's concerns is that his name sounds like a girl's. Another is that his parents have recently divorced and he thinks his father may not love him anymore. Still another is that he has found himself friendless in a new school where some creep is always stealing the good things out of his lunch.

Leigh begins to correspond with Boyd Henshaw, author of *Ways to Amuse a Dog*. Through his letters and diary entries (addressed to "Dear Mr. Pretend Henshaw"), Leigh reveals his hopes and fears, strengths and weaknesses, and his increasing maturity as he discovers the value of life.

Winner of the 1984 John Newbery Medal for the most distinguished book for children, *Dear Mr. Henshaw* is simply and humourously written but still manages to have depths of meaning.

A Gathering of Days, A New England Girl's Journal 1830-32, by Joan W. Blos. New York: Charles Scribner, 1979. Hardcover, $15; ages 10-14.

"We attended services, this being Christmas Day. Can there, I wonder, be a chill more fierce than that which gathers in a building all week, then hurls itself, as if too long caged, at those who venture in?"

In her 13th year, Catherine Hall began a journal. Times for her were harsh, yet her days unfold with a sparkling clarity. As she grapples with responsibility, injustice, a new stepmother, and death, Catherine grows from childhood to womanhood. Her life is guided daily by Christian teachings and her final journal entry is a testament to her faith.

A Gathering of Days was awarded the John Newbery Medal in 1980. It is a beautiful and believable story about the richness of life and its continuance even in the face of hardships and death.

Mama's Going to Buy You a Mockingbird, by Jean Little. Markham, Ont.: Penguin Books, 1984. Hardcover, $15; softcover $3.95; ages 11-14.

"'Don't worry about Jeremy,' said Aunt Margery. 'He's a sensible boy. I'm sure he understands how impossible a dog would be in the circumstances.'

"Jeremy twitched with irritation and stared at the floor. Dad, though, turned on her, his face reddening with sudden anger.

"'Why should he understand? He's not quite twelve. I'm nearly fifty and I can't understand. The circumstances, as you call them, are beyond any of our understanding.'"

Jeremy's father has cancer. Tess's mother has abandoned her. Can they reach out to each other from the depths of their private griefs?

Canadian author Jean Little has created a classic novel in this sensitively written story about finding joy in the midst of pain. Winner of the Canadian Library Association Book of the Year for Children 1985 and the Ruth Schwartz Book Award 1985, this is a life-affirming book.

A Fine White Dust, by Cynthia Rylant. New York: Bradbury Press, 1986. Softcover, $3.25; ages 11-14.

"Maybe there really is a hell where people burn and burn. I just know one thing: If enough people do to me what the Preacher did, then if I do go to hell, I'll be used to it."

Pete Cassidy's parents go to church at Easter and Christmas time. His best friend Rufus is an atheist.

But Pete wants something more. He has a hunger for Jesus that even going to church every Sunday won't satisfy. He is afraid of going to hell because he can't be good enough or holy enough to deserve having Jesus die for him.

When the Preacher Man came to town the summer Pete turned 13, it seemed like an answer to his prayers. Instead, he and his faith were nearly destroyed.

A Fine White Dust examines the timely subject of an idol with feet of clay, and his impact on an impressionable follower. It was a Newbery Honour Book in 1987.

One-Eyed Cat by Paula Fox. New York: Dell Yearling, 1984. Softcover, $4.50; ages 10 and up.

"The cat came closer to the house.

"'The eye isn't there,' Ned said. 'There's just a little hole.' He felt a touch of fear.

"'You're right,' said Mr. Scully. 'The cold does that to them sometimes .... Or else someone used him for target practice. A boy would do that. A living target is more interesting than a tin can."

Ned Wallis, the only child of a minister and his invalid wife, has a secret guilt.

It started with the air rifle his Uncle Hilary gave him for his 11th birthday. Ned knew he was forbidden to use it until he was 14, but he just wanted to try it out once.

In the moonlit night, he fired at the dark shadow without thinking. Was it the wild grey cat? And who was watching him from the attic window?

A powerful book about love, guilt and moral courage, *One-Eyed Cat* was a New York Times Notable Book of the Year, 1984, and a Newbery Honour Book, 1984.

False Face by Welwyn Wilton Katz. Toronto: Groundwood Books, 1987. Softcover, $7.95; ages 12-15.

"The black and the red, the hating and the loving, the two savage, eternal halves struggling beneath civilized appearances everywhere, Laney thought. Masks on masks on masks."

In each of her books for young people, Canadian author Welwyn Wilton Katz has created her themes around the ancient and infinite struggle of good against evil. *False Face* captures this struggle in a gripping and fast-paced adventure centred around an ancient Indian mask and its miniature mate.

The masks pose great danger for those who come into contact with them. They are all the more powerful because they stimulate the inner drives and desires of the people who possess them, giving them the magic to destroy others. The struggle of good over evil becomes an internal one.

Laney McIntyre, an engaging heroine, fights to stop the evil power with the help of Canadian Indian Tom Walsh. Winner of the International Fiction Contest in 1987, *False Face* is an excellent allegory.

Margaret Hoggard holds a diploma from the Institute of Children's Literature in Writing for Children and Teenagers. She lives in Strathroy, Ont., and works part-time in a library. She has developed special reading programs for children and wrote a children's and parents' book column for four years.

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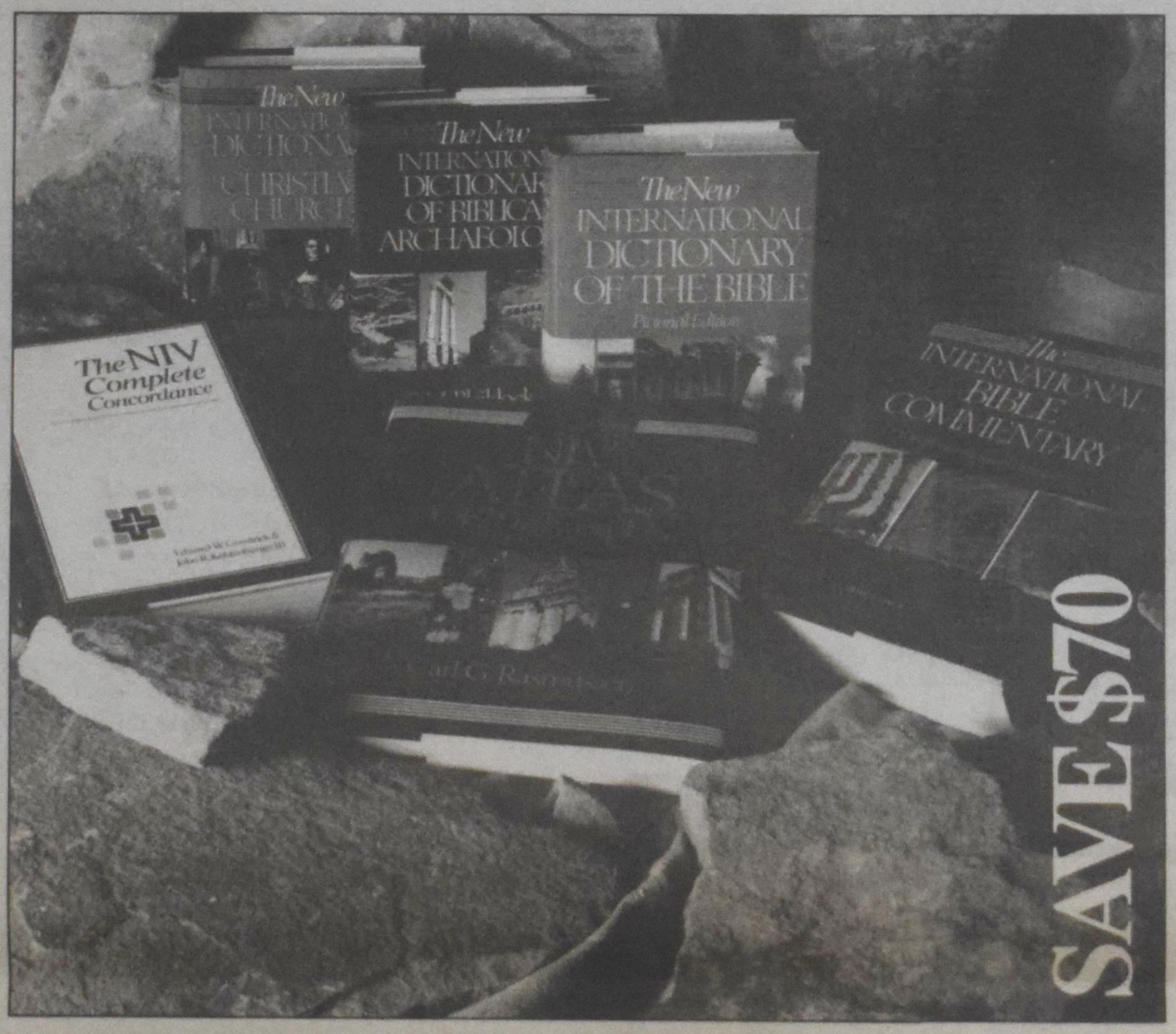

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